RYLE'S OPEN GATE

BY

SUSAN TEACKLE MOORE

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SUSAN TEACKLE MOORE

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TO THE

MEMORY OF MY FRIEND,

JOHN ELIOT BOWEN.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

It was in October of last year that Robin and I planned a ramble through the south side of Long Island. Our plan took us to the uttermost point eastward; our buckboard got no farther than Craddock. For, within a mile of that village, a furious storm overtook us and we were glad to run under cover out of the rain.

Our shelter proved to be a ruined woodshed that was part of an old homestead, a habitation so old, and withal so singularly homelike, as to assure me at once of its being a survival of the antiquities of this quaint old place.

Robin is my boy. He has barely touched his eleventh year, but he is not the less on that account to be considered his mother's caretaker, fellow-helper, confidential friend.

Our lives are bounded by narrow limits; there are but two of us, — Robin and I.

It was while we sat there under the shed, staring at the downpour, and nerving ourselves to some daring deed, that a whimsical thought came to me, — "A perfect summer home for Robin and me next year!"

As we gazed and romanced, a figure thatched in tarpaulins crossed our vision, a fisherman probably, a man beyond doubt. He halted, and gave us a prolonged stare. Over one shoulder he had swung a clam rake, from which dangled a disreputable eel-basket; the water in his hat brim went round and round, and then overflowed in spurts, like a neglected roof-gutter.

I bespoke him civilly, and inquired the way to some inn for the night. He did not answer at once, but darted from under his shaggy brows a shrewd, calculating glance.

"Ye kin bide right 'ere whar ye be, if ye like," he said at last. "That there house belongs to me, it do, every stitch an' stiver of it."

"And you live in it yourself?" Robin asked.

"I do that, sonny; leastways I lives in it winters. My bunk 's over the kitching; ye kin see the chimbleys from whar ye set."

Robin looked doubtful, but held his peace.

"I 'll build ye up a fire in the keepin' room in two shakes — a reg'lar old roarer. Ye 're mortial wet, . . . an' the rain don't seem noways o' lettin' up," he added artfully.

"What think you, Robin?" said I, appealing to my small adviser. Before he could answer, the man continued: —

"I ain't no slouch of a cook nuther, ye kin bet. Cook ye up a supper that 'll make yer — make yer — Well! fix it to suit yerselves," — with the effect of washing his hands of the matter, — "but I 'm ready to bet my nex' haul o' mack'rel agin a dead moss-bunker the rain ain't a-goin' to hold up this side o' mornin'."

"How 'd we sleep?" put in the boy.

"Sleep? House is chuck full o' feather-beds, reg'lar old seven sleepers, an' there 's a mort o' tack-me-downs up garret."

"Tack-me-downs?" queried my boy.

"Yap; an' I ain't a-goin' to gouge no fancy price out'n nairy one o' ye, nuther, that 's gospel. I 'm a-goin' to charge ye seventy-five cents apiece, an' the hoss a quarter. That 's vittles an' drink an' lodgin', ye see, an' firewood ain't a-goin' to cost ye nawthin'. Come in; come inside an' see fur yerselves."

Tying our horse, we furled our useless umbrella, and made a rush for the house, the old sea-dog sauntering after. He unlocked the Dutch door and gave us entrance. A short look at the possibilities of the interior and a long one out of the window decided us. Yes, we would stay, and gladly.

A glorious, rollicking wood-fire was soon laughing on the hearth, and shouting at the top of its voice up the chimney. Later, we strayed over the house and up to the very garret, where we discovered the boasted "tack-me-downs," which proved to be the

old-fashioned, country-made quilt. Washing our faces in the ice-water from the well, with just one meek little lunch napkin for towel, which was jealously spread out to dry for to-morrow's use, we evolved a fresh toilet from one collar and two handkerchiefs, and were ready for supper.

I have been young and am now — otherwise, but never before nor since do I remember such a supper. We ate for the simple joy of eating; our appetites on their feather edge, and the Bohemian dash to everything the spice we craved.

We had roast oysters (I am hungry now as I think of them); fried fish that might be eels (perish the thought), but we swallowed them down; scrambled potatoes, which our cook assured us were not fried; eggs that *were* fried, and coffee.

"My name 's Ryle," he said, laying down a second tray of oysters, — "Ryle Ryerson; but my given name 'll do you, I reckon. Them oyshters is right out o' the bay, real out 'n' out Blue P'ints, an' no back talk."

He opened the refractory ones for us with the broken blade of his jackknife, and was otherwise useful.

Our supper being eaten, he cleared away the dishes, swept up the hearth with a turkey wing, and mended the fire so well that the patch was really bigger than the original fabric. Then, setting one all-forlorn tallow candle in our midst, he remarked: —

"Ef there 's anything more I kin do for ye, come outside an' holler, I ain't fur off;" and he closed the door.

The storm raged all night and the next day. Robin and I were as happy as two chimney swallows. We chattered and twittered as we made believe keep house, confiding to each other with frequent bursts of delight that to-day was best of all. The very fireplace smacked of good cheer, and that charm which makes one wish to cuddle down between its open arms and rest. So much so that Robin, under this undefined influence, called it our "Castle Cosy;" but to me it was a memory of my childhood, the ingle-side, the fireside of bygone times.

That evening we made our host a visit in his own quarters. The result was an agreement in due form to rent his house to us for the coming season, from May until October.

When to-morrow arrived, Robin brought me a sad story. Our horse was stiff in both knees, and could hardly be coaxed out of the stable.

"Must ha' got chilled-like in his j'ints, a-standin' out there in the wind," quoth Ryle. "You 'd orter blanketed him fust off; ye mought ha' knowed the beast was overhet, makin' time agin the rain. All the way from Garden City, too."

He spoke with that latent scorn which is so essentially a masculine trait, an attitude that the mind of man permits itself toward the inferior sex when a woman attempts a thing beyond her enforced limitations.

"We will get into the cars and go home, dear boy. It has cleared off beautifully," I added sadly, for my heart sank with Robin's. So home to the city — our ramble was ended.

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RYLE'S OPEN GATE.

CHAPTER I.

INGLESIDE.

INGLESIDE is a lovely remnant of long ago: low-roofed, with brooding eaves that shelter many a weary bird, many a crooning dove; bristling with chimneys that have been chapels of log-fire worshipers for generations, — chimneys whose throats are mellowed and seasoned with forests of oak, pine, and chestnut, and whose lungs are as breathful and life-giving as the west wind.

Its windows shine with good humor. The very Dutch doors can do nothing by halves, but with one mind together swing wide open with joyous greeting to every guest.

The house has three gables, a resident

ghost, and a pedigree. The household now numbers five souls, not counting the ghost. Robin and I are two; then Nathan, our man of all work, the housemaid Mary (one time Robin's nurse), and the cook, Keziah.

The ghost — but the ghost can wait.

As to the house itself, there is welcome, good fellowship, and good cheer in every seam and rimple of its wholesome, homely countenance.

No matter how wild, how uncanny, how uncivil the weather, our home is just then and always perfectly happy. The winter winds never visit it too roughly; the sunbeams are never unkind. Together they make a nimbus about its hoary head, and deepen the cool shadows of the clustering maples.

"Ryle" says it was built "more 'n a hundred years ago." I don't believe a word of it. It was never built; it is simply a lovely dimple on the face of nature, a matchless lichen in tender, kindly tones.

If its organic integrity is sustained by

sticks, stones, or stucco, I defy you to find them. Moss and ivy, honeysuckle and drooping vines, have made common cause, and woven a delicious tangle that holds the house forever bound.

Wise men and wise women must have dwelt herein; for, whatever their needs or prejudices, the symmetry and quaint beauty of its old-time appointments have never been disturbed.

To begin, the ceilings are so low, and the wainscotings so high, that not one stenciled picture from the firelight can be lost upon them. The fireplaces are unfathomable mines of delight, they are so vast, so bountiful, of such gracious and goodly conditions. The backlogs are prodigious: the long ones come through the doorway endwise; their cut and character being as unconventional as our pine-cone kindlings, so gnarled and knotty are they, so resinous and fragrant. The slender branches are best of all.

Over the blaze hangs a hilarious kettle, which is kept within bounds by a staid and

ancient crane, — a crone that is always on duty with her chatelaine of pot-hooks and hangers. She must be, for this is a busy, buzzy fireside of ours.

The mantel jambs are very corner cupboards, uncanny in their mysterious depths. To us they are the dearest crannies and tuck-away places in the world for the delicacies of our æsthetic housekeeping. One small griddle, the skillet, and a spidery gridiron are to be reckoned among these delicacies.

Blustering nights and rainy days we are in the habit of making up select parties of two, — Robin and I. There is revelry within, and much wassail and feasting. When we have invited each other with due formality to our next banquet, — which takes place immediately, both having accepted with bows, — we put our heads together to plan the feast.

"We 're not going to have anything digestible this time, mamma," declares this small caterer; "we 're going to have a real party. None of your roast apples dangling

by strings, nor sweet potatoes under the backlog, nor doll-baby's biscuits."

If this is sarcasm, it is intentional, and I am distinctly snubbed; for to such simples doth my disciplined body incline.

"How 's Welsh rarebit?" I ask sweetly, — "that 's good and risky; and clam fritters to begin with."

"Immense! Simply immense! Hold up till I see if Nathan 's back from the village to open the clams; he is such an everlasting dawdle-cat."

While Robin has gone to see, I am hauling out the "delicacies" from their fireside fastnesses. "Yes, Nathan is back. Nathan will open 'em right away. Nathan made bold to bring Master Robin a pint o' peanuts — no offense intended — an' would n't Master Robin like a extry shovelful o' coals out o' the kitching fire? Keziah 's got more 'n a plenty. An' ain't there nothin' else Nathan kin do for Master Robin?"

All of which means that this consolidated humbug met Ryle at the blacksmith's, and

decided to stop for half a minute. He is really an hour and a half behind time, and he knows it.

"Good!" crows the boy; "good enough! Hand 'em along, Nathan, and we 'll start the taffy right away. Now, mamma, lovely, darling mamma, I 've thought up something just splendif."

"If it has anything to do with cold chicken, I 'm not going to listen to you."

"Yes, it has something to do with cold chicken, and you are — going — to listen to — me. Bother to-morrow's dinner! Ham and eggs is a dinner for a king. Keziah says we sha'n't have a scrap of that cold chicken to devil, anyhow, because the minister 's coming. S'pose he is! what 's that got to do with it, I 'd like to know! Where 's the sense of stuffy cold chicken for dinner when there 's hot ham and eggs in the house? I begged and I begged her, and she just won't. Bother Keziah!"

Two arms are about my neck, and with them, for down-weight, a mouthful of arguments as sweet as convincing.

"Now, mamma, won't *you* go out to the kitchen and speak to her? She 's afraid of you. Such a dandy bed of coals, too; it 's a sin and a shame to waste 'em." Which means that my boy will gladly burn his bonny face to a blister, if I will let him devil to-morrow's drumsticks now, with lots of salt, and a dash of mustard, and the least speck of curry for style.

Gay little supper parties! Merry host and guest! Not a wise mother, perhaps, — not wholesome doctrine, surely; but ah! the love and life and light of those hours, the sympathy and trust!

Do you know wherein lies the witchery, the enchantment, of your wood-fire? Some other worshiper says it is the imprisoned sunshine of ages that we see in the blaze. Yes, and I may add that in their toils are caught the departing souls of dazzling sunsets, caught and held fast until their day of resurrection.

And what other romance and mystery are woven into it?

At twilight, when Nature holds her breath to listen to the echoes of the day, listen too, my fellow-worshiper, and you will hear the voices of birds that sang in these burning boughs before you were born. These logs are brimful of liquid melody; full of songs without words, vesper hymns, and nocturnes; teeming with Thanksgiving psalms and Christmas carols; musical with joyous greetings and love songs. How the birds have poured their tender secrets, their passion and their ecstasy, into the bosoms of these, their faithful friends — and ours! The katydids and crickets have done honest work, too, in the orchestra, with their dance music, grace notes, and trills. Do we not find in these logs and boughs Nature's phonographs?

As you sit listening and lingering, don't you love to think that you believe in ghosts, and witches, and hobgoblins? Will you ever know again as thrilling a romance as Santa Claus? In the very deepest depths of your soul, you believe in him still.

There is no flaw in my title to Ingleside. I insist upon it, in spite of Ryle's airs of ownership on pay-day and other days; in spite of his ugly gleams and beetling brows. I insist upon it; it is all mine.

You know the story, of course, about old Ryle Ryerson. It tells how he bought this place of Somebody who vowed he would not live in it another night because it was haunted. Then that wary old fox made a bid for the property, and has been the envy and despair of all Craddock ever since.

Say he did buy it, just for argument, one thing is certain — the resident ghost would be its chief charm to Ryle, for he very properly judges himself equal to anybody's ghost, living or dead. This one happened to be Somebody's mother-in-law.

Well, what did Ryle care for that? It had been his priceless privilege to dispose of two of his own in his lifetime, and to oust them at crises when nothing less than an earthquake or cyclone could be expected to move them.

The particular Somebody may have objected to the presiding ghostly genius of his home; may have been so lost to shame as to consider the ghost his natural enemy: but then all the same Somebody was a man and a brother, for he created an atmosphere, without and within, as subtle as it is satisfying, — an atmosphere that will never depart till this dear old house is gathered to its — woodpile.

Such a home as this is to a true artist what an old violin is to a musician.

Its furnishings alone are a fair education in æsthetics. Our rector calls it a tender romance; a pastoral poem; a classic. Our rector is entitled to a hearing, for he studies it and loves it well. His happiest holiday is to share its modest good cheer, its juicy bones and dainty crusts.

The children at the Seaside Home near by are of the rector's mind, but in fewer syllables. To them it is a castle, — a castle in a fairy tale, with a good fairy, a beautiful young prince, an old witch (we beg Keziah's

pardon), and bags and bags of money in these hinged and scutcheoned chests.

But we have other neighbors. The Goldbarrs drive in at four o'clock, to leave cards, — too near train time, but they will risk it. Neighborly civilities are not to be omitted. Better call to-day and have done with it.

Bang hears them coming, and his emotions are too many for him. He stands on three legs and talks with both ears. When Robin is away, Bang is a host in himself.

"Down, you rascal! quiet, sir! charge!"

The dog takes me literally. He is down at the gate in two bounds, offers his best bows, and assumes charge of the company.

The equipage is truly overwhelming. The harness is bewildering in its clatter; it inspires the horses. They pick up their well-bred feet accordingly, and are high and mighty. The coachman is pompous and the footman sublime.

The Mistress is "at home," for there she sits at half-length in a queer old bamboo armchair under the big chestnut. As she

rises and comes forward to add her greeting to Bang's, she is aware that the ladies of the house of Goldbarr are not unmindful of the cut of her calico gown, nor yet indifferent to the pale lavender ribbons. "They are a part of the atmosphere of the house," they are kind enough to say.

Who could be dull or weary, moody or cynical, in a crisp calico gown with lavender ribbons?—always remembering the bamboo chair as a setting, and the lengthening shadows of the low-spreading chestnut.

Bang opens the wire doors with his nose, and leads the way into the house.

"What an interior! What a lesson in mediæval art! What a relic of antiquity! Positively a picture by Burne Jones."

A young disciple of the new school, a charming girl who comes with the party, says trippingly, "It is a symphony in Pompeiian reds, accentuated with old blues and sketchy furniture." If this is really so, I should let go the train of my precious calico that is so thriftily in hand, and trail it in

the dust. Down it goes in a reckless sweep, while Bang scrambles over and under it, and makes a fringe of the ruffle.

"What ravishing old mahogany! What a scrap of a piano! What a huge fireplace! Don't the ashes make a hurricane of work for the servants, blowing over everything? And who in the name of goodness dusts all this china on the wall? Was it your own fad to hang the soup tureen and dishes up there? How awfully cunning! Corner cupboards with glass doors is as far as we have dared. And is the rest of the house as fascinating? And did you get it all out of your own head? What a — what an artist you are! Nothing after all like old-fashioned things and old-fashioned comfort."

Which is very interesting, not to say naïve. As if anything or anybody of the house of Goldbarr could be old or worn, or faded or a relic; the Goldbarrs, who are as brand-new and brilliant as a gold double-eagle, fresh from the mint.

The Ingot coach-and-four, with the Judge

and Mrs. Ingot inside, now dashes through the gateway, and swirls around our bit of lawn, just as the Goldbarrs are taking leave, protesting, "There goes the whistle, and we're frightfully late. We've had a charming call; perfectly charming. We're 'at home' Monday afternoons — tea at five o'clock; and 'au revoir.'" And they are gone, leaving a train of fair words and splendor that lingers with us full many a day to come.

The Ingot chariot stops the way. The calico gown and lavender ribbons arise and shine again.

"What a love of a cottage! How perfectly sweet! What a precious petunia bed! My dear, those are petunias, if you please," — turning upon her husband with the air of holding him personally responsible for them, — "and that wretched Martin of ours vows and declares petunias can't be made to grow on the south side of Long Island; fancy! But you should hear the rector go on about this place. He raves over it; perfectly raves."

"Mr. Armstrong is very kind," I begin, but she rattles on.

"Worthy man, the rector, excellent creature. Liberal, progressive, a bit eccentric, and that sort of thing, but he does n't bore one; that 's something."

"No, he does n't bore one," I assent primly; "he is extremely interesting; he is immensely worth while;" but Mrs. Ingot does not hear me.

"Fairly good reader, Mr. Armstrong, and short sermons, — there 's where he shows his sense," she continues.

"Oh!" I say.

"Good idea when you don't cut the service — these fifteen minute sermons. Gives you just time to rest the horses nicely. Why, Judge Ingot has actually taken to coming to church himself; fancy!"

Mrs. Ingot is surprised that a man of the rector's talents can afford to bury himself in such a place as Craddock. She is equally surprised that city "help" can be induced to do without set-tubs and running water.

Mine must be angels. She is surprised at a number of other things, and is good enough to say so.

The Judge says nothing. He has his own opinion of this sort of rat-trap, rookery, ramshackle, — an opinion that is free to the public later in the day. "The house is damp, doleful, deathly, ill-drained, ill-conditioned, radically wrong. How any white woman with a mind, with a grain of common sense, can choose such a hole, and be willing to live in it" —

My friend, don't believe him. Hear my side of it. That a man with a mind should be insensible to the rest and peace and blessing of this atmosphere is like being born color-blind, or destitute of the instinct of music. He is an anomaly. We are sorry for him.

Come! let us stop abusing the neighbors, and talk about pleasant things; look at my piano, for instance.

I like to think the sensitive Somebody left it to me as a legacy, along with the rest

of my rights and title. I found it covered and locked, key missing. "Did n't never have no key into it," Ryle explained. The little instrument had slept the sleep of the forgotten through all the chances and changes of intervening years until I, the elect lady, awakened it. It is indeed a "scrap" of a piano. With its back up it is not so very much bigger than an open snuff-box; but it serves. Robin's banjo keeps it in good humor, it is so attentive and deferential. Our sea fogs are trying to both their tempers and timbres; but on the whole their spirits have not been so dampened as to make them other than important members of the family.

Then there is our writing-table, convivial and beguiling; its orderly disorder as artistic as it is charming. We have pulled it so close to the low window-seat that Robin has to climb over to reach his own place by my side.

The tea-table in the opposite window is equally convivial. It is the dearest joy of

our hearts. Its proper place is in the other room, of course, — a misty, moisty, dingy room in close communion with the kitchen, — a place adapted to funeral baked-meats, and other unwholesome arrangements.

Our merry hand-to-hand will none of these heresies. It has turned a cold shoulder to the shadows, and faces the light.

Like my little lad, this table has the gift of friendship. It is forever enlarging its borders to embrace the toilworn and hungry: the old doctor, who is on his way to Moratika — "a serious case — a consultation, my dear madam, and can stop only for a bite:" the little schoolmistress at recess, who will truly have to eat and run, and is so sorry, so ashamed, so awfully obliged: the young minister, who has given the blessed morning to his sermon; who has been on the rack and under the screws of his "Fourthly" till his head is a buzz-saw; whose thinking apparatus has run down, ma'am, and who has himself run down to me to have it wound up again; who is at his last gasp for a breath

of fresh air, and is so surprised to meet the schoolmistress!

But, we have other guests — toilers of another cast. Knights-errant are they in a pathetic sense, and knights also of my round table, when on fair days we spread it under the willows. The organ man with the monkey, specially the monkey; the patent furniture-polish man; the banana man; the old woman with knitted washrags and tomato pincushions to sell; the barefoot boy with the matches, — these come from the highways and byways.

Look at them! beasts of burden that they are. Notice with what hesitating step and furtive mien they wend their way. You will have to hasten to the gate and entreat them kindly. They are very, very weary.

Robin brings them in with a faculty all his own; seats them at the round table, and serves them gently. As they depart from our gate they set a seal in its forehead, — a cross that other such wanderers may see and take heart. To them it is a pledge of the

love and charity to be found within: but to me it is the mystic token of the divine touch upon the lintel and doorposts of our dwelling!

CHAPTER II.

RYLE.

THE autocrat of this fishing village of Craddock is old Ryle Ryerson, a man of special forecast in times and tides, winds and weather; shrewd, choleric, implacable; great in a horse trade; a fisherman of repute; and the most unblushing and inveterate romancer in existence.

Take a good look at him! A grizzled head and beard that never knew a comb; bleared, unwholesome eyes that squint and leer to make your flesh creep; a nose that has seen hard service and got the worst of it in many a brawl; and evil fangs, at intervals, in his yawning jaws.

His dress consists of a coarse woolen shirt without form, and void of buttons; corduroy trousers stuffed into hobnailed

highlows, with a strap from an old halter to gird them.

His hat, — well, that should have a paragraph all to itself. It gives emphasis and dramatic flavor to his maudlin meanderings. It is fit to be the crazy ragman's dearest delight. It is Ryle's too; I believe he sleeps in it. He would as soon think of taking the skin off his bones when he goes to bed, as any rag of his raiment.

His toilet is a simple affair; water and towel have no part in it. Ryle Ryerson — christened Royal — lends himself to no such superstition. A volley of yawns, a violent convulsion, and he is "on deck" for the day.

Goldbarr is the god all Craddock worships, and Ryle is his prophet. The old fisherman's attitude toward that mighty man is not to be questioned; it rests upon a sure basis. But for Ryle Ryerson, all the good fish, scale, shell, and otherwise, would not only be "in the sea, in the sea," but they would elect to stay there.

Other potentates than Archibald Goldbarr

tremble before this doughty fisherman, — he makes or mars their South-side banquets according to his own good pleasure. For who will engage to whistle him in as he lies in his boat, at anchor offshore? His whiskey bottle yielded up its spirit long ago; it rests inglorious beside its brother reprobate. So does the magnificent sheepshead, that should be on the grill in the great man's kitchen, this very minute.

At sundown, when the skipper comes to life, who will whistle for a breeze to blow the craft ashore? Not Ryle. Nor will he so much as lift an oar to speed the fish to its destination, not he; not on the great South Bay at least, which is as full of whims and fancies as the flossy clouds that drape its shores.

The winds and the sun are of one mind at eventide; they like to go down together after the tension of a long day, and together they rest from their labors. Ryle is equally serene. He proposes to rest from his, until the moon comes on duty, which will be in a

couple of hours. Like others of her sex she can be depended upon to stir up a breeze; he will leave it all to her. The moon is in a coquettish humor to-night; from beneath her veil she flashes the faintest semblance of a smile across the bay. Ryle feels rather than sees her airy greeting. At first glimpse of her bonny face above the water-line, he is alert. The reefs are loosened, and every scrap of sail flung out. He has the tiller in one hand and a coil of rope in the other, and you may be sure that the least flaw of wind will serve that wary old skipper to better purpose than a reefing breeze would another.

What a rare, mysterious legend will he weave to-morrow, when he delivers the sheepshead! — a legend that may dare to hold up its head with other monstrous inventions of his evil genius. The cook will not believe one word of the fish story, and is sure to tell him so.

His friends in council, though, delight in his lies. They hang upon his words with

the true fisherman slouch, swallowing everything — scales, fins, and tail — without winking, and humping themselves comfortably over the biggest chunks.

Ryle is never so agreeable as when "half seas over," as the fisherfolk say. Then his fancy is at high-water mark, and amazing yarns come ashore.

Behold the autocrat to-night as he stands at ease in his own doorway, back from a three-day cruise. He has brought home a mighty cargo of sea-bass and bluefish, — they are lying now in state in his ice-house, ready for to-morrow's consideration. His catboat is at anchor in the stream, with sails furled and decks trim. He has been up to the village with divers empty bottles; Ryle expects company.

Soon the stillness is shaken by the rhythmical measure of dipping oars, which are bringing the sharpies and dories from over the creek and down the river. One and another will scrape her keel upon the bit of beach before his cabin door. From up the

road and down the lane his cronies come. "Ryle 's home! Ryle 's home!"

There is Mange, the dog doctor, — universally known as "the doctor," much to the disgust of the other professionals, who look down in contempt upon the little card gummed to the glass window of our village post-office by four unpleasant smears of flour paste, and bearing the inscription —

ROBERT MANGE, D. D.

and Mr. Teddy Steppnfetcher, who is one of the guards of Goldbarr's tally-ho, selected for his shape and manners; and Larkin, the other coach-guard; and Nathan Taggart, gardener, groom, and useful man at Ingleside; and a host of others.

"Evenin', Teddy! Sir-to-you, Larkin," Ryle begins. "Take a seat an' set down. Ef that ain't old Pickaback gittin' over the fence, it 's the dog doctor; I can 't never tell t'other from which 'thout my specs. That you, doctor? Shake! How 's the purps? Mr. Taggart, my respec's; you do me

proud, I 'm sure. Gen'lemen, you 'll find reserved seats on the fence; no extry charge for the dress circle."

The dog doctor sidles up to the speaker, who is by this time sprawled on what he calls "the woodpile," but which in reality is a helter-skelter of brush, chips, bark, rotten timbers, and other wreckage.

"You hain't been up to Goldbarr's, Ryle," observes Teddy; "you done well. I rec'-mend you to fetch your shotgun along when you git ready to go. If there warn't Hail Columby over there to-night when the sheepshead an' sof' crabs never showed up, then I hope I may never! The old man come out with his spy-glass, he did, an' riz the roof. He went round and round them stables, roarin' like thunder, an' cussin' blue blazes."

"There was some partic'lar bigbugs," says Larkin, "come down from the city for a reg'lar South-side spread. The company waited, they did. I was sent kitin' to the willage on Bobtail, las' minute, to see what

I could scrape up. Bless your soul an' body, I got jest what I was sent for; the renchin's o' the peddlin' waggins was what I got. *I tell you*, Mr. Ryerson, if the old man could ha' spotted you with his spy-glass 'long about the time that 'ere South-side spread got put on the table, you 'd ha' thought it was money in your pocket if you had never been born."

A roar of laughter greets this defiance. Ryle is imperturbable.

"Don't excite yourself, Larkin; them fish is ordered for to-day. They 're in my ice-house this minute a-coolin' o' theirselves agin they 're wanted. They died game, they did; an' they won't be fittin' for brilin' nor bilin' nuther, till they 've had time to settle their minds to it."

There is danger-light in his sunburnt eyes that Mange is quick to see; he effects a digression.

"I see Goldbarr's gamekeeper, Mr. Trigger, to-day," he said. "He come a'ter me, and fetched me over to the kennels to one

o' them fox terriers o' his'n. It had been chawed up considerable by a bull purp. It did n't 'mount to more 'n a good greasin' an' a splint or two. While I was settin' the bone, I ast him how much loose cash was throwed away on the old man's fancy poultry. Ye 'll think I 'm stretchin', an' I don't blame ye. 'Cordin' to Mr. Trigger, ten thousand dollars could n't buy the lot of 'em."

"Oh, buy your grandmother!" said Ryle. "Ten thousand dollars! Call it fif-teen, and I 'll talk to you. Why, take them spangled Hamburgs, and golden Minorcas alone, they 'll bring more a head — more a head "— casting about for a simile — "than you 'd ever bring, Teddy, my boy, put you up at the Mineola Fair, lugs, togs, and braces."

Teddy is sufficiently aware of his gifts, and poses as somebody in particular at these gatherings, to the unspeakable rage of the rest.

"Got a reef took in your sail, my son," snarls Ryle. "Sposin' you shinny over, till I haul up that precious mere-sham o' mine."

Teddy makes a symmetrical parcel of himself, and poses elsewhere. Ryle watches him narrowly with half-closed eyes and an ugly twist of his jaw. The dog doctor immediately makes a face as nearly to match as his own features will effect.

There is a something almost tragic in Mange's subservience to the old tyrant. Thackeray longed to have been Shakespeare's bootblack. To Mange, Ryle is enough. He believes in him, shadows him, trembles before him, and adores him in dumb-dog fashion.

"Teddy 's took a back seat, doctor," says Ryle. "Wery prudent o' Teddy; more room out there to spread hisself," he continues, wagging his head. Mange sniffs, and wags his with bated fervor.

Ryle worms himself beneath the brush-heap. A moment of suspense, a spasm, a cursory remark, and he reappears with an eelskin tobacco pouch between his teeth, and a corncob pipe in two pieces.

In burrowing, Ryle caused a suspicious

clink of bottles within the woodpile which is music to the ears of that convivial band; Mange is thrilled to his tenderest nerve. He gazes thirstily, and murmurs as to a familiar spirit, "Dry! dry as last year's peapod."

Ryle is as deaf as a graven image. He fits the stem into place, measures the capacity of the corncob with his eye, and fills it with a single pinch of the precious weed. The dog doctor scratches a match on his "trouser," and tenders it dutifully to his host, who winks one eye slowly for thanks, "fires up," and proceeds with his parable.

"Why punish your head, sir!" — this to the company in general, — "I was goin' my rounds t'other day, and I happened on one o' them ch'ice breeds o' his'n. I disremember prezactly, but I mistrust it mought ha' been a Cochin-China; and then agin it mought ha' been a Houdan. It had got out'n the pen somehow 'nuther, and it went click! for a dandy pea-fowl that was swaggerin' round and snubbin' its betters. Well, sir! tail-

feathers was flyin' in the face o' Providence, topknots laid low, an', as I 'm a livin' sinner, I darsn't tech so much as a bristle of 'em. Arter the exercises, Trigger takes up a collection," — with a sly twinkle. "The ladies o' the fambly takes an' trims their bunnets with 'em, Trigger says."

"I ain't no use for that kind o' windfall," declares Larkin, with engaging frankness. "The fambly is welcome to 'em, and the kitchen chimbly too, for all me. The hothouse peaches are about my size."

"Stiddy, my boy," says Ryle, "take it easy; that kind o' cold wittles ain't for the likes o' you, nor me nuther. I got a peach-pit, though, somewheres 'bout these britchaloons, if I kin fish it out, which is a leetle more 'n the rest o' ye kin show."

He rummages all the chinks and slits in what he calls his "riggin'," and finds a thing that he turns over and over in his callous palm.

"M'h-h'm! that 's 'bout the size of it. What 's yer 'pinions o' that there peach-pit,

friends an' feller citizens? Heft it, some on ye."

Mange leans forward to the veriest feather edge of his balance, to seize it. Larkin addresses himself to the dignity of his cigar, and is immovable.

"I 'll be blowed if it ain't the size of a cocoanut!" chimes in the dog doctor. "It beats me, Ryle, how you git in so sociable with them bigbugs; I can't make it out."

"Oh, that ain't nawthin' to mention. The butler sells the pits from the table for what 'll keep him in chaws the rest o' the year. This one 's worth a quarter, any time o' day; but it ain't for sale, this one ain't. I keeps it for fits."

He pulls at his corncob fervently; there is no sign of life.

"Who 's a match handy? This 'ere durn pipe 's out agin. Here you, Larkin, gimme a light; that see-gar o' yourn is a *leetle* too toney for pore folks, but I 'll be keerful of it."

The sprig of gentility rises from his easy

degrees, removes the fragrant Havana from his lips, and, with a flourish, hands it over. The old man examines it quizzically, blows away the ashes, nurses the expiring corncob into life, and, with a grin, returns the delicacy.

There is another impressive person in the company to-night, — a person built on a larger scale; none other than Mr. Nathan Taggart, of Ingleside. His presence at these meetings is a condescension. To tell the truth, nothing could keep him away. "Ryle's home!" is the electric word that will fuse the community into a mass-meeting within its boundaries. Nor threats nor entreaties may swerve a mortal man among them from the downward path to his cabin door.

"You was about to observe, Mr. Ryerson," — Nathan is particular in his speech. His dignity and importance forbid familiarities, but he is leaning upon his knees, all the same, in an anguish of attention.

"Jes' so, Mister Taggart," — Ryle is not

to be taught manners, — "jes' so, sir! I was about to observe, sir, that them Goldbarrs makes out to grow their peaches under glass the year round. Under glass, sir, an' they 're as big — as big " —

He clenches his great knuckles and holds them out to the general view : —

" No, sir ; they 'd take two o' that, sir, ev'ry mother's son of 'em ; an' a cold ten dollars apiece, an' dirt cheap, afore he gits his teeth into 'em."

He marks the impression produced, and then winds up with —

" Gen'lemen o' the jury, this are a quare world. Take it on the half-shell, 'thout salt an' pepper, it 's *'bout* the quarest world I ever tackled."

" Ye ain't tried 'em all yit, old man," Teddy mutters under his breath.

" Now there 's them Goldbarrs," — Ryle pays no attention to Teddy's aside, — " if they ain't as quare as you make 'em, I 'll sell my hat for a herrin'."

He pulls off the thing thus apostrophized,

and brandishes it aloft. When he returns it to its place, it is cocked over one ear, the brim well down.

"They won't eat nawthin' that 's growed ou'doors — spiles the flavor, mind ye! That 's what they *say*," he continues impartially, "and I dessay 't ain't all poppycock (cuss that skeeter); but ou'doors is good enough for 'Ryle' every time. I 'll take that peach-pit, if it 's the same to you, brother Taggart."

He returns it to a corner of a cotton rag that pretends to be a handkerchief. This he knots securely, and, winding the rest into a wad, crams it into a chink of his waistband.

The dog doctor nods stealthily and significantly to Taggart, who has been struggling with fate and the eel-basket for some little time. Given that eel-basket upside down, with the even balance of a good temper, he proposes to sit on it. He has made a butterfly bow of himself, and does not look comfortable.

Mange, on the contrary, is entirely comfortable. He is doubled up as snug as any clasp-knife, hugging his lean knees to his bosom, and rocking cosily. Presently he breaks out in a high staccato, —

"I hearn tell their strawb'ries is ripe in March."

"March!" returns Ryle, "why, man alive, they 're gittin' on their las' legs by that time. What 's this his name is anyhow, — the head gardener, ye know, — Bloom, Bloomer, Bloomsbury! that 's him, — Bloomsbury. Well, sir, 't was 'long 'bout middle o' March, fur as I can recommember, Bloomsbury tipped me a wink one day as I was a-passin', an' sent out that 'ere little imp-o'-Satan o' his'n to hitch my horse, Whiskey, to a post, an' keep flies off'n him."

"Flies! oh, come off, old man! Flies in March, you know," — says a sneering voice that might be Teddy's. Ryle goes right on: —

"But by yer leave, sez I, an' jes' as much 'bleeged to ye, Whiskey 'll stand better 'thout

mindin', sez I. He would n't take no for a answer, — he 's that affable. Nawthin' would n't do for it, but I must toddle into that there hothouse an' measure them straw-b'ries. Me an' him measured 'em, — no monkeyin'. Lord bless ye, they measures nine to the quart right along. Hulls *on*, mind ye," with an air of strict accuracy; "take 'em as they come, nine to the quart. He gimme one o' the super-extrees for luck. I never see the like in my born days. I fetched it home in my hat, and, if ye 'll b'lieve me, 't would n't go into this 'ere din tipper — tin dipper, I would say, noways I could scrouge it."

A croak from some doubting Thomas in the rear is repeated by Larkin. Ryle lifts his head from the woodpile, and tightens his hat like a compress over both ears. Then with slow emphasis and scornful uplifting of his brows, —

"You was a-goin' to remark, Mister Larkin?" —

But that gentleman is unconscious of

peril. His eyes are fixed upon vacancy, and he is whistling softly.

The old man casts himself into the depths of his safe deposit, and brings up the identical bottle that Mange has not for one moment forgotten. He pulls the cork with his teeth, snuffs at it, and with an obliging "Here 's to ye, gen'lemen!" throws back his head, mouthing over the drops in a truly maddening manner. The genial bottle is then passed around. When it comes back to its owner, he turns it upside down, and screwing one eye to the vanishing point, remarks: —

"Dry, did you say, Doctor? Dry it is; — dry as the second Presbyterian meetin'-'ouse."

This sally is electric. There is a general upheaval of whoops and cheers, and a double shuffle of boots, in which the chastened Teddy is conspicuous.

Taggart now comes forward. He has been swelling with the importance of his own communication; he will speak now, or perish: —

"Ahem! Mr. Steppnfetcher, have ye run afoul o' that fool Fitz-Jinkins? His folks has took the Louisdor cottage; says he 's kin to the Goldbarrs, cuss his imperence. . . . Git out, ye imp o' Satan!" with a sudden change of base as his decorous hat goes shying over the woodpile.

"Why, it 's Buster," cries an old clam digger from the Point, — "it 's Buster Bloomsbury. What 's in the wind now, Buster?"

"Taggart's tile, fur as I can see,"— and Mr. Steppnfetcher, otherwise Teddy, giggles as naturally as his "shape and manners" will permit.

Buster is deeply aggrieved.

"I did n't go for to do it, nohow; I stubbed my toe, I did — blame it — it hurts!"

"That 's all right, sonny," chirps Teddy. He stretches across the woodpile for the fleeing "tile," dusts and reshapes it, and then returns it to its owner. "That 's all right. You 'll be a man yet, Buster."

"What 's up, bub; what 's wanted?" Ryle repeats the inquiry.

"You 're wanted, sir. Pop sent me over to ast you, would n't you come over to our house right away an' bring 'long yer dom'-noes. Pop says he ain't feelin' good to-night, an' he wants chirkin' up. I bin to the store for fi'-cents wuth o' pollygollic," the boy says finally as a clinching argument.

The old man is so lifted up by the invitation that he does not speak at once. When he does, there is an obligato movement by Mange to the effect that he "guesses he must be gittin' 'long," and a chorus from the others that "they on'y stopped over for a shake."

Ryle offers protests as false as they are ingenious.

"All right, mates," he says at last; "what suits you suits me. Call agin. Ye kin tell yer popper, Buster, I send my respec's, an' I 'll be right along arter I sets my pickle. Come, boy, git a gait on ye! Cut!"

The autocrat hath spoken.

CHAPTER III.

MAGGY'S SISTER.

INGLESIDE nestles near the edge of Craddock creek. On the opposite shore rises the stately villa of Archibald Goldbarr; and as close to the skirts of the porter's lodge as was ever Mordecai to the king's gate, stands the Seaside Home, — that Heavenly Rest for the helpless and the weary.

We passed the place, the afternoon of our arrival, and we could see the lean bodies and pallid faces of those miserable ones as they lay in hammocks, on folding chairs, or rude wooden settles. Faces in which the light of youth and hope had never shone; girls of twenty in the decline of life, aged beyond repair. Even the little children were a bitter mockery of childhood; they had been born old and anxious and distrust-

ful. As we beheld them in their languor and their loneliness, we knew full well the work given us to do.

So after Ingleside had been set in order, and after the three days' rain had properly opened the season, a lovely morning arrives: and with it our new-born resolve to do some little thing to comfort and cheer these waifs and strays.

The day is perfect for tired eyes and quivering nerves. The sun is taking a post-meridian nap, and all the harmonies of nature are in the minor key. A gracious, kindly gray sky; a breeze that is scarcely more than a fragrance, but what a fragrance! a delicious blending of sea smells and new-mown hay everywhere.

Robin has joined me on the veranda after our noon dinner. He is perched on the railing, lady-fashion, his back against the post. Being of tennisable age, he is resplendent in orange stripes and surcingle; and, as the minister puts it, we are "talking conversation."

The conversation is all about "Fetch," and his new spring coat, Robin's mind being given to dress just now. Fetch is our best and brawniest horse, and a thoroughbred.

Nathan delights in his beauty as much as we. He has dressed and polished him today till he is a dazzling sight to see.

The man comes browsing along, mouth full of grass, hat tilted over his nose. He comes meandering over my best petunia bed so exactly as our cow Sukey would do, that we are fain to cry out, "Soh, Sukey! soh, lady!" but refrain, from motives of delicacy. I give the order for the afternoon crisply, announcing, "Master Robin will drive."

When the carriage is brought round to the door, Robin climbs over the wheel into his seat and seizes the reins. We drive over the bridge, which is a skeleton in armor now, and take the back road, across lots, to the meek and lowly wicket-gate of the Seaside Home. We seek the gentle sister in charge, and tell her our errand.

Together we climb the stairs. In a pleasant little room in the quiet wing of the house lies a girl of seventeen, whose deformed body, whose ghastly face, whose sunken eyes would bring the tears to yours. I kneel beside her, and try with gentle words to rouse her. She puts out her hand with a timid gesture to clasp mine, and I think for half a minute the good sister will have to take charge of me.

Such a fragment! Such a poor, scanty scrap of a hand! I cover it quickly with both of mine. "What happened, my child?"

"Nothink did n't happen, ma'am; I was born that way; I did n't never have no fingers on that one. But it 's a real good thumb; I could n't manage at all without my thumb."

She says it quite simply; she sees nothing tragic in her destitution.

I lift her on my arm and plead with her. We take her up against her own piteous protest, and dress her in the rags that she calls her clothes; and with my valiant old

gray cloak, — that veteran in service, — to hap her up cosily and cover the holes and patches, we induce her to come with us. A friend of hers comes too, to hearten her, and spare her too strange a feeling with us; and so we drive away.

She tells me all her touching story: where she lives, how she lives, how tired she is of living. Better for this child that she forget her misery for a little while; far better that she should not speak her thoughts. I say this with what tact and gentleness I may; I try by every simple art to turn her mind into pleasant channels. But the pain is there; it can be soothed only by sympathy, — the sympathy that is balm to a suffering heart.

Her father is a 'longshoreman, usually out of work and usually drunk. There is a little sister, too, who has been discharged from the hospital as incurable — a little creature, dwarfed, crippled, bedridden.

"And I could n't let her go to the poor-house; no, lady, not if I starved for it.

We 're decent folks, me and Maggy is, and so is father. Mother left her to me when she was dyin', and I promised her."

Then after a pause, in which she seems to be weighing the value of my sympathy, —

"Maggy 's a real comfort, that 's what Maggy is. I bring home to her nights the scraps of silk left from my work — the cutter saves 'em up for me, he 's that friendly. You could n't never believe the cute things she makes out of 'em. I fix her the best I can before I go to work, and she minds herself the day amazin'."

"You leave her quite alone? Is there nobody else the livelong day?"

"Oh, *she* ain't lonesome, she ain't that kind, Maggy ain't; she 's too busy."

"Tell me how you manage."

"Well, ma'am, it 'll sound funny to you, and I don't rightly know as I can make you understand. First off, I takes a cheer, and I turns it bottom up'ards agin the head o' the bed, — the wall, o' course, for the bed ain't got no head to it. When you tilt a cheer

that-a-way, you git a slant out o' the wrong side o' the back of it good as you can buy for money; and by the time a bit o' quilt gits over it, and the pillow endwise over that, an' you come to prop Maggy agin it and tuck her in snug all round, she 's that easy and cosy she might be the Sleepin' Beauty, and room to spare." She laughs at her happy conceit.

"How about dinner?" Robin asks.

"Oh, that 's easy as nothin' 't all; that 's the least part of it. I can fix her up a real good dinner for ten cents. Did j' ever try how fur a knuckle will go? Then there 's pig's puddin', that 's grand; it 's real fillin' for the price. I 've only got to cover it up, and set it on the winder-sill where she can reach it herself, with two cents' worth o' milk in her mug to wash it down — the milkman gives good measure, you see, 'cause it 's for Maggy. It 's quite a cup, ma'am, by the time he 's done with it."

"Does she never rest, — that little sister of yours?" I ask.

"She 's got to, some days, lady; when there 's a storm comin' up, mebbe, or somethin' else partic'lar. Them times she 's flat of her back, it aches so; more times she gits so excited over her doll rags and needle-books and bits o' crazy quilt, she works away like a house-afire the whole day long. Smart! she 's smart as lightnin'."

"And your father, what does *he* do?"

"Father 's never cross with Maggy, never. It 's all along of a lick he give her wunst that ails her now. He can't never seem to forgit that lick, father can't," dropping her gentle voice to a whisper. "He did n't know no more 'n the dead 'bout it at the time."

She was silent for a moment, and then continued: —

"'T was a Friday night; I rec'lect it same as yest'day. Mother was 'live then, and we was livin' on a canal boat. The boat was layin' at the dock unloadin'. Us children had been put to bed, and the baby, that 's Maggy, was asleep. A hail-storm come up,

and the thunder was awful. It was dretful late. I shut up my eyes like mother bid me, and pretended; but all the time I was watchin' mother's face bendin' over the tallow dip; I was watchin' and projeckin', for I saw she were oneasy. Every little minute she 'd open the door and stand outside, and listen. Then she 'd slip over to the winder, and put her face close to the glass where it warn't rag stuffin', and listen. She could n't git it open noways, for it had been nailed up tight to keep we children from fallin' into the water when she took the shoes home to the boss, and had to lock us in. Mother stood there at the winder and listened, but she could n't see nothink or hear nothink for the lightnin' an' the thunder.

"Bimeby there was a dretful sound, like the roof fallin' in, or mebbe the old boat goin' to pieces. Mother started up, tremblin' all over; she dropped her work and knocked the candle over. Next minute father busted the door open (I believe he fell agin it), and called out loud for a light.

Mother was frightened, but she never let on. She jes' groped her way over to him, quiet like, and touched him, and spoke to him soft, the way she allers did when he warn't hisself.

"'Tom,' she says, 'if you 'll stand jes' where you are, an' give me a minute to think, I'll find a match an' strike a light. I 've got your supper settin' on the stove for you, Tom; it 's a reel nice supper.'

"I dunno how to tell it, ma'am; I know I tell it ill; but I 'd ruther go on with it, if you don't mind.

"Father had fell in the street a good ways from home; he had hurt his wris', and cut a gash in his forehead, and his face was all bloody. Nobody had n't picked him up, for it was in a lonesome kind o' place, where river thieves hides away sometimes. There he was, shiverin' cold, and jes' as wet as slosh; for the hail had turned to rain, and the rain was comin' down in buckets. When he come to hisself 'nough to crawl home, he was pretty nigh beat out.

"Mother scratched a match and it flared up, but all she could do, she could n't find the candle; it had rolled under the stove when she jumped.

"'Git another, Mary,' says father; 'git a wax one this time, git two; pantry 's full of 'em,' — jes' that-a-way, ma'am. It was all there was, and mother knowed it. I see her face workin' behind the matches as she scratched 'em. Oh, how white and tired it looked!

"All of a suddent father bust out laffin', — the kind that 's worse 'n cursin'; you know the kind, lady. He had somethink heavy in his hand, an' oh, ma'am, he threw it! He did n't take no aim nor nothink, but he threw it; an' it fell crost Maggy in the dark. It missed me, an' hit Maggy."

There is a pitiful break in her voice that makes me instinctively draw the poor child closer.

"Don't think about it, dear; let it all go for to-day, — just for to-day. See that tress of blue smoke curling away above the tree-

tops over there! That 's the Gypsy camp; we 'll come back that way, and see the funny little babies in their scarlet caps. Their mothers swing them from the branches to be out of the way; they swing them in nets, like so many oranges in a candy store. The babies don't mind it a bit, they like it. They crow, and kick their fat legs, and swing themselves to sleep. Poor little scraps! they have to learn to mind themselves early."

"Hullo!" cries Robin, "look at the yellow-legs, look quick! See 'em go! Oh, oh, for my shotgun! They 're clipping it for Calabash Island, the rowdies."

The girl is silent for a little while. She follows the birds with her serious, earnest eyes till they are but a handful of shot flung sheer into the ether. Then she turns them upon the westering mists and vapors, and, as she gazes thoughtfully, she sees among them a rift of glory, — a single line of vivid beauty.

We others are silent too. Is there really

but one rift in the thick darkness of this young girl's life? Will there be no day-dawn of light and color? Does that monotonous, sombre sky tell her fortune? Or is that living line a written promise of golden days behind the curtain?

My poor child moves uneasily upon my arm; she catches her breath in a half-spoken sob.

"You must n't think so bad o' father, ma'am. He was always misfort'nit; he never had no fair chance. Why, he would n't hurt a hair o' that baby's head beknownst, and oh, to think how it happened!

"She was layin' next the wall, and when it struck her, she just threw up her little hands, give one long, dretful screech, and then was still. Mother sunk down on her knees, all of a heap, where she was; she never cried out nor moaned, but she give a click in her throat wunst, like she was stranglin'. And then, ma'am, the dear Lord knowed she could n't bear no more that night. In one second the old boat was as light as day.

The Lord himself come down from Heaven. He was 'a light to her feet and a lamp to her path.' Them 's Bible words, ma'am; mother marked the place with a picture card in her little red Bible, so I'd always know where to find 'em, — 'a light to her feet.' "

"It was the lightning," I say, half to myself, — "and your mother found the candle, after all?" but she stops me at the word.

"Oh, no, she did n't, lady, — she did n't never find the candle; it was all the dear Lord. And it was n't the lightnin' neither, 't was 'the light of his countenance.' "

Then, scanning my face anxiously, —

"Don't you believe in mericles? Mother did; and you 'd believe in 'em too, lady, if you was pore folks. The likes of we could n't make no scratch at all — 't would n't never be no use tryin' — if there warn't mericles." She says it very reverently.

"And your father?" I ask.

"Father said he was dizzy and his head thumped, and he guessed he 'd turn in, and he did n't want no supper. Mother could n't

help him; she had snatched up my little sister, and was feelin' her all over and tryin' to bring her to."

The tremor in her voice has yielded to the long habit of self-repression, of heroic resolve; but the thrill remains.

"She was always the dearest little thing, lady, and the cutest. She was goin' on three. The knowin'est, old-fashionest little old grandmother; always runnin' round after mother, and grabbin' her apurn; and makin' funny little dips for bows, till you could n't help lovin' her.

"We could n't never rightly tell what ailed her. Happen it was the fright. The doctor at the horsepittle said it was percussion — percussion of the spine. All I know is, she never stepped a step after that night, never one step.

"Mother got her into the horsepittle, and she was there a whole year. There was a rich lady come twicet a week reg'lar to read stories to the men in the accident ward. She cottoned to Maggy right away, and mother

got to know her. Father said luck had turned, and mebbe he was goin' to get a chance now. The lady was dretful kind. She got reg'lar work on the docks for father. She give him clo'es and a real good overcoat and two splendid new red flannel shirts that had n't been wore or tore or nothink; and she spoke up for mother, and got her fine sewin' to take home that paid good. Mother sprunted up and took heart. We moved out o' the canal boat, and rented two rooms in a real decent neighborhood; I went to the public that winter, and learnt my tables and spellin' in two syllables, and I got first prize in 'Readinmadeasy.' Jest as true as Friday come and I brought home the medal for conduct, mother give me a cent, — a cent o' my own to keep. I did n't have to put it in the missionary box, neither!" — this with kindling eyes.

"Mother give me a red bank for Christmas, to keep 'em in, but I could spend 'em in candy if I liked. It was the shape of a beehive, and made out o' clay — red clay,

like a brickbat. It had a little round button on top, and a slit to drop the cents in below the button, and when you shook it, it sounded as rich as gold dollars."

"What a jolly bank!" says Robin. "Mine was a tin turtle; it was horrid. I swapped it off with a boy for five white alleys and a jackknife. Was n't he a dunce, though? Heuh! I should say so."

"Never mind, Robin, you 're interrupting. And how long was your little sister in the hospital?"

"A year, ma'am, a whole year; and she never cost nobody a single cent all that time. Mother had hopes o' Maggy all that year, and we was that comf'able, you could n't think.

"One day father got into a fight with a man that owed him a dollar. It was all the man's fault, father said, and served him right. Father said the law warn't just, an' he never see such a guv'ment; but he had to go to jail for thirty days, all the same, and the man was took in a nambulance to the horsepittle.

"Mother went straight to the lady, to see if nothink could n't be done. The lady was sick abed and could n't see nobody. Mother kep' on goin' and hopin' and prayin' — till the lady died. My! what a grand funeral they give her!

"She was the bes' friend mother ever had," — shaking her head sadly; "and what a friend she was to my little sister! After that, troubles come thicker 'n hail, a-peltin' us same as they was cobblestones, and beatin' the very life out o' mother.

"Maggy was put out the horsepittle. She was brought home in the same nambulance that took her into it; they said she was incurable, and it was 'gainst the rules to keep her. When father was let out at last he warn't the same, father warn't; he was diff'rent. . . . I guess I better not speak o' that part of it, ma'am."

"I would n't, dear; I know all about it. Tell me about your little sister."

"I 'm comin' to that, lady. When Maggy came back we had to move out, 'cause there

warn't no money comin' in, and no ways o' gittin' none. Mother went back to the shoe bindin', and I could n't be spared for no more schoolin'. I was turned 'leven. I was always crazy over books, but that did n't help it any."

"No, it did n't help it any," I find myself repeating.

"I got work in a necktie fact'ry. The boss soon see I was handy with my needle, and he gimme three dollars a week. When mother died, he raised it to four. I 've worked there ever since."

As she leans against me, pouring out her sorrowful heart, the strong salt winds are blowing purely, with healing and hope, cheer and cleansing, in their breath. As I watch her upturned face, I can see the shadows of death lifting — lifting from her eyes, her mouth, her brow; and in their place has come the hue of life.

By and by we wander from the main road into a narrow pathway that leads through our own beloved pine woods, — a pathway

thickly carpeted with pine needles, and redolent of balsam, birch, and other pungent delights. A moment more, and we have left the kindly shadows and the fragrance behind us: our carriage wheels are creasing and crumpling the veils and scarfs of seaweed that are tossed high upon the shore; and there before us, in all its delicious beauty, lies our great South Bay. It is alive with white crests, white wings, white sails; the very sky is lending its mood to the humor of the hour.

Our sick girl has forgotten her pain. She is alert, eager: gazing at the living beauty, the adorable loveliness, the joy and gladness of this world, as she will gaze at their superlatives some day in the Kingdom of Heaven, hereafter.

She has never seen the country before. The common rural sights and sounds and conditions amaze her; fill her innocent soul with an ecstasy that overflows in broken words and radiant tears.

Little by little I tell her the traditions of

the places we pass, — Indian legends, love stories of the colonists, stories of a stern and tragic cast. My sick girl is erect, tense: her eyes alight and glowing.

We remember our promise of the Gypsies, and come home by the other road, through denser woods, where they have chosen to pitch their tents. We arrive at the witching hour of their evening meal. The Gypsy pots and kettles are just as busy as they can be, — busier far than the women who minister to them. The lids are making a great to-do over the secrets they know and must not tell. Ever and anon one topples over sideways in an overburst of laughter. Robin is delighted, but my poor child does not care to linger; it is all too real.

"They 're like the river thieves about the docks in the city," she says. "Many 's the time I 've run for my life from 'em, and the women are dretful."

"Have you really, though?" cries the boy, turning round and eying the speaker curiously.

Then, recovering himself, he points with the whip: —

"Look at the babies! look at 'em swinging from the trees like monkeys, look! look! Don't go home yet, mamma, that 's a goody; let 's have all our fortunes told, — I 've got a quarter!"

But no, I will not listen to him; this perfect afternoon must have no flaw, no blemish, for this, our stranger friend.

We drive freshly through the bridle-path, that is no path at all, and out again into the free, beautiful open. As we turn into the narrow lane that brings us back to the Seaside Home, she lays her crumpled hand upon mine that is whole, and says humbly, —

"Will you kiss me, ma'am, — would you very much mind?"

"Kiss you, my poor child!" I take her gentle face in both hands, and kiss her heartily; and as her faltering lips touch mine, I know that she has sealed them with an unspeakable blessing forever.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LITTLE SCHOOLMISTRESS.

The little schoolmistress has a pretty habit of inviting herself to breakfast with us. If Robin and I are late or busy or elsewhere, the Dutch chair is sure to be at home to receive her. When we appear, she has joined hands with the honeysuckle at the window, and together they are throwing sweet kisses to us with their delicate white fingers; tossing kisses, and wafting good wishes with the breath of the morning.

Nature is luxurious on the south side of our Island. She affects vapor baths, especially at sunrise; and she takes her time about it.

The girl's fair face against the golden mist is a rare and radiant picture; so pure, so fresh, so wholesome. My handmaiden

thinks so too. She gazes at her with worshipful eyes. The little schoolmistress looks in at the window, and desires to know the exact amount of chocolate to be brewed this morning. Mary knows to a pinch; it has been her painful duty to grate every morsel.

"The full of the big hominy pipkin, Miss; the clairgy 's comin', d' ye moind," — gravely. "He 'll go bail for foive coops, he will, for all his manners an' 'No, I nivers.' 'T ain't skimped naythur; it 's as rich as Goldbarr, Miss."

"Nobody down yet, Mary? Where 's Robin?"

"Robin wint on a arrant fur his mar, afore sun-up; he wint over the crik," — peering out of the window for some sign of her darling. "You Buster!" shaking her fist at an apple-cheeked urchin who is marching straight up to the front door. "Ye villin! Lave the moosharoons forninst the kitchen windy loike I bid yees. How many 's the toimes I got to tell ye that, ye haythen!"

"Did n't never tell me no sich a thing;" the boy faces her, quite unabashed.

"I did, thin, ye spalpeen. Ye don't know nothink, and ye always will. Phat 'll Miss Ethel say to yees?"

But this is not school time; there is only a kindly twinkle in Miss Ethel's eyes.

"Bedad, thin, an' here cooms the minister lep'in down the lane, an' dhivil a dhrop o' crame to his berries!" With which startling announcement, she snatches up a squat-shaped crystal pitcher from the table, and makes off with it in the direction of the dairy.

The girl hesitates no longer. She swings her lithe body over the sill with the ease of an athlete, turns her shapely shoulders the other way, and when the minister arrives, she is deep in the mysteries of drawn-stitch.

The man has a boyish trick of blushing. He has attained the masterful age of thirty; he is six feet and a fraction over, and he has never grown up! Who says so? The

three old maids that live at the other end of the village with their black cats say so; and they certainly ought to know. "When a man sets himself up for a preacher, — when a man takes on himself the charge of a parish, — when a mortal man presumes to button up his waistcoat behind, with never so much as a shoestring for a necktie, they are free to confess it 's about time that man grew up."

With due respect to the old maids, *we* don't think so, and we hope and devoutly pray he never will. We like the dash and fervor he puts into football and tennis; we like him in his boating dress, ready to row a race, or straining every sinew in his vigorous body to reach the stake-boat, up the bay. We like to watch the grand sweep of his oar, — the long pull and the steady pull; to watch his eyes, that are not unconscious of the other eyes that are following him with eager, anxious gaze. And when he wins, we like the rainbow in his eyes, — the rainbow of joy and triumph.

By what subtle sense did he know who else was coming to breakfast this morning? That he did know is written in red letters upon his face. Perhaps the east windows of the rectory were in the plot. Those eyes are far-sighted.

The little schoolmistress is as fond of the water as any sunbeam. I mention this, because it bears on the case. One of the pleasant things in her meagre life is to waken with the birds, dress quickly, steal through the silent house like a breath of pure air, out through the back door, and off and away to the bluff on the shore.

She is there in time to give the first sunbeam good morning, and then the girl and the sunbeam have a vapor bath together.

Her life is not so full of pleasures that she can afford to lose this one. It is a seamy life, at best, for this brave, self-helpful girl. For her are seams with ragged edges, and sometimes a welt that presses on a sensitive nerve. She keeps these seams on the under side; covers the shreds and thread-

bare places with her womanly dignity and reserve ; asks pity and protection of no one : but she will give them graciously to you and to me when we need them.

The young rector may not consent to answer the early birds. But when such a messenger as that self-same sunbeam arrives at his casement, fresh from its vapor bath, and tells its errand, he is awake indeed, — awake, clothed, and in his right mind. Being of the nobler sex, he does not have to lift latches stealthily, close doors softly, and glide away. He may clear the stairs in one mad leap, snatch the hat that is at hand, rattle the bolts, fling the door open, and be off like a rushing mighty wind, leaving his prim, precise housekeeper to gather up the fragments and repair damages.

The mighty wind goes no further than Ingleside, as it happens, for the golden mist and the two sunbeams have left the shore, and are already at the window, resting.

The mighty wind is not without intelligence. It resolves itself at once into its

normal condition of a refreshing breeze, lowers its colors, — flaming as they are, and would very much like to come in at the window.

That any guest should be on the wrong side of any entrance to Ingleside is against the laws of our order, — least of all the minister; yet there he stands, blushing like a schoolboy. Lifting his hat, he bends his head with a fine gesture.

"Good morning, Miss Ethel! May I come in?"

"Why, Mr. Armstrong! That you? What in the wide world brings you out so early?"

"Early! Why, breakfast, of course, — what else?"

"Breakfast, indeed," cries the girl, gayly; "takes more than breakfast to tempt me out of doors this time of day."

"What, then, for instance?"

"Why, sunrise, of course, — a clear case of sunrise. I had it thoroughly about two hours ago; am convalescing slowly; expect

to sit up presently and take a little nourishment."

"Absurd, — perfectly absurd!"

"Not a bit of it, Mr. Armstrong, it was — ecstatic."

"Possibly, Miss Ethel, but I doubt it; I 'm sensitive about sunrises in midsummer. In winter they 're all very well, — I will go so far as to say they should be encouraged; but in July, you know" —

"Well, it all happened so long ago," — she looks at him in a dreadfully teasing way, — "and I seem to be doing so nicely, I thought I might speak of it."

Both laugh. It is nonsense; but it seems akin to the bubbling effervescence of the morning.

"I 'm making a study of sunrises," she says; "it 's fascinating. After a thoughtful contemplation of the subject for some time, I feel qualified to 'hand in my report,' as we say to the School Committee, and 'give an opinion.'"

"Speaking of opinions, what is yours upon

the subject of breakfast? I solemnly do declare I 'm as hungry as a bear."

"No, really? Then if you 'll excuse me," — and she edges away from him.

"As hungry as a bear, Miss Ethel, 'pon honor. From my point of observation I smell deviled drumsticks floating in the air; and I 'm willing to wager my new tennis racket upon mushroom omelet."

"Now that guess does you credit," she says demurely; "for you could not possibly have met Buster on the road, and looked into his basket!"

"Do you know, that boy is a character," the minister says; "he has more yeast in his composition than anybody I know. What that youngster needs is a good, strong lid on him, to keep him in bounds."

"Ah, don't, Mr. Armstrong; please don't. Good, wholesome yeast is a tremendous help. If I had not more than most women of my work-a-day life, I could never rise above the fetters and encumbrances. Take this morning. I wakened with a great,

stupid lump in my throat. There was no reasonable reason for it in the world. Nerves? Not a bit of it. Nerves, to my mind, are two parts selfishness and the rest ill temper. No, it was a lingering weight of an unhappy discussion the night before. It was the lid that had got shut down too tightly, don't you see."

She smiles quietly as she speaks, and then falls silent. The man regards her wistfully; his lips move in voiceless words, but he does not trust himself to utter them. Presently she turns her face to him.

"There is a golden remedy for ailing minds and nerves right here if we will take it," she says.

"May be, but I doubt its virtue when one's mental vane points east. Mine 's been pointing that way for quite a spell, as Ryle puts it."

"Has it? then my remedy is the remedy for you. I had n't run three races in the sunshine with Bang this morning before I was as happy as he. Was n't I, you dear

old bow-wow? Speak up, sir! Speak up, and tell the company what you know about it."

The dog lays his head on her lap and wags assent, eying the minister attentively.

"The lid was gone — was n't it, doggie? — and the yeast just bubbling over."

"Ah, Miss Ethel, you are a lesson to me always. What am I? A worm, — a crawling worm, a black beetle" —

"No! Then you 're blacker than you 're painted;" the rector is of purest Saxon type.

"A black beetle," he repeats slowly.

"You don't say so!"

"Worse than that," he persists; "I 'm a fly, a dead fly, floating down the sluice of time."

"Now you 're calling names" —

"I go about making a parade of my powers and taking up considerable room. What do I achieve? What, indeed? I spend my days beating the air, or trying to fill a sieve with water."

He pulls off his hat and turns it round and round. Unconsciously he is revolving the problems of life in his disordered mind. Come to compare that wheel of fate with a certain hat that is tilted far back on a fair head before him, they are surprisingly alike. Both are of rough straw, trimmed with a broad band of boating flannel. Absurdly incongruous with the waistcoat of clerical cut and unhappy fame; deliciously in tone with the dainty white muslin and azure ribbons.

The schoolmistress is a lovely picture in that old oaken chair. How it emphasizes her young beauty in every curve and outline! Our grandmothers knew the artistic value of a carven high-backed elbow-chair as a setting. The wisdom that died with them lives again in the interiors of to-day.

Stuffed and tufted abominations in brocatelle and horsehair are no more. Peace to their ashes! Long live Chippendale!

"I don't believe that seat is good for you," Miss Ethel says lightly. "You are

trying to balance yourself and some other cumbersome truths upon too narrow a basis; and just because you have n't the moral support of your second cup of chocolate, you choose to be discouraged. You had a great deal better climb in at the window and have Bang's place on the ottoman. He has gone upstairs to wake up the family."

"Discouraged! You always discourage me, Miss Ethel. The record of a single day in your life is as far beyond my best endeavor as is that subtle something that we call success."

The girl counts the threads in her breadth of linen, takes a single strand in her hand, and draws it through the woof without breaking. The young man watches her guiding fingers earnestly, — watches them, after they have fallen idly in her lap. Presently she lifts her clear gray eyes to his, and says gently, —

"My life? my friend, — mine? Do you know what it holds? Only threads that are poor and pitiful, — threads that must be

disentangled with an even, steady touch. If one is broken, the pattern is marred, strained, and the fabric is worthless. Shabby tasks they are at best, and ah! how many ravelings left over, not worth the keeping!"

"Who is n't worth the keeping?" asks a person who enters with a plate of hot biscuits in her hand; "worth keeping indeed! both of you are immensely worth keeping. Don't stop to argue, for here comes the omelet. Mr. Armstrong! how good of you! Ethel, my dear, I approve of you! Come right to breakfast; we won't wait for Robin. He has gone down the creek for strawberries."

CHAPTER V.

MY FRIEND, THE GHOST.

Truly this little table of ours has the gift of friendship. It is essentially and constitutionally feminine. Its airs and graces and its passion for dress are in character. It is a perpetual dissolving view of toilets; no seaside belle, her first season, could do better.

When the chocolate pot is empty; when the mushrooms are but a luscious memory; when our guests have left us (the schoolhouse, by a happy dispensation, is directly on the road to the rectory); when the hostess has exchanged opinions with the butcher upon the open question of cutlets or chops; when that bad quarter of an hour is ended, and with it the cares of the day, — then I find this feminine thing resplendent in a

drapery of Turkey red. My work-basket is there for show; the key-basket for discipline, — which, by the way, is a family joke, and more amusing to Keziah than the rest of us. Freshly cut magazines abound; freshly cut wild flowers do much more abound.

In due order arrives dinner, done up in damask and fine linen; and anon, the movable feast of high tea, the table *décolleté*, of course. Cool evenings bring to light a humble candle or two, which are put out of countenance at once by the firelight.

The chairs at Ingleside are character studies. Some are rough-hewn, angular, unyielding; some grim and forbidding. Others are of such gracious dispositions they are worn to the grain; they hold out their arms to you always, and bid you welcome.

If they should fail to soothe you, the divans and cushioned settles invite you to their cosy corners.

Do you happen to know a barrel-chair? Not a paltry flour barrel, remember, but a

big fellow, of the sugar persuasion. If you do, you have discovered the exact locality of the lap of luxury. How kindly they fit every ailing spot in your weary frame.

They remind you of trained nurses, in their blue and white uniform, and in their faculty and faithfulness. Two of them are in charge of my bedroom fire, the white bear-skin between them to mind the sparks and embers. Will you come with us across the hall, and behold the rest of our kingdom?

We enter through what seems to be a curious panel in the wall, — a door, in fact, — that is gilded and inlaid and cunningly carven. It has a history.

In its youth it swung in the cabin of an Algerine corsair. Its fine qualities unfitted it for that career. It was washed away, picked up, and took passage, as another cabin door, on a trading vessel bound for Valparaiso.

It never saw Valparaiso. This beautiful relic drifted hither and thither, seeking rest and finding none, until, upon the breast of a

tidal wave, it came ashore at our very gates, — bruised, maimed, and the life nearly beaten out of it.

In this plight it was found by Somebody, who lifted it tenderly, placed it on a litter, and bore it hither. Then the wounds were dressed and healed, and being clothed anew in grace and beauty, it was given this post of honor. This panel is now an open-sesame to an interior of a hundred years ago.

We enter the room by an abrupt descent of three steps, — a pretty whim that we find in some old homes.

Behold that stately old four-poster! Did you ever see such a grandee? with its tester to the ceiling, its valance and petticoat of painted muslin, its dimity counterpane, its pillow frills and naperies. It contains a huge feather-bed, full of feathers that are feathers. Not cotton batting, turkey wings, tarred clothes-line, and other such surprise parcels, any of which you will find to-day in your own high and mighty pillows if you take pains to rip them open.

Three carpet-covered steps are beside it. Without this happy medium, none but a monkey or a daddy-long-legs could hope to scale its outposts.

Being a feather-bed, and this the nineteenth century, it is my bounden duty to renounce it with all its works. And so I will, — when the summer is ended, and our lease with it. Meanwhile the trundle-bed is hauled out from beneath it o' nights, and a small boy I know curls himself up on it in luxurious fashion, face to the firelight.

Ask the boy his opinion of that trundle-bed some cold, wet night in May or late September, when the log-fire has been on its best behavior all day, — when a harvest of living glory is there to prove its good deeds.

The crickets and I are having a delightful time by the other fire. We have exchanged confidences upon matters and things. They have announced their determination to "cheer up" under all circumstances, and I agree to do the same — with limitations.

I hear Keziah in the nether regions, beat-

ing up muffins for the morning. This old darkey is — but I must describe Keziah. Imagine one of these elderly, 'sponsible, high doxology, head-handkerchief colored women, — so deeply, darkly colored as to be black. She belongs to a class fast becoming extinct. She is one of the instances where the long habit of a life's devoted service has become a dearer passion than the guise and semblance, the romance and mystery, of Liberty! This dear old remnant of plantation days has christened me, in her dialect, "Mis' M'riar."

Music hath charms for this, my dusky handmaid. As her brawny arm wields that wooden spoon, an astonishing medley, in falsetto, joins our chorus

"Jingo bum, cider come,
Massa gib poor nigga some.
Massa 'n' Missee tellee me
When I die dey set me free!
Jingo bum, cider come,
Massa gib ole nigga some!"

She sings with the fervor of a camp-meet-

ing shout. It rouses the small sleepy-head from the pillow; Robin is wide awake, out of that trundle-bed, and on his restless feet again. Such a rattlety-bang as comes hurtling through the closed doors! The boy is having a hilarious time: he is a whole minstrel show, end-men included, — patting Juba, beating Husky, and dancing a darkey hoe-down.

It behooves me that I leave the crickets, and go in and admonish him. But the old Dutch clock speaks before me; it points its aged hand to the hour, and calls out huskily, "Nine o'clock!" in its mother-tongue.

What a dear old clock it is, to be sure! Standing in this draughty hall so many years, what better do you expect than a cracked voice, a wheezy, sneezy snuffle, and a broken constitution?

This clock has a trick, when the rest of the house is silent, of soliloquizing like unreal people in books; and when you are wakeful, it will croon a lullaby that will bring to you surcease of struggle.

How heartening is the sound of its voice at dead o' night, when hoot-owls and other hobgoblins are whistling and shrilling to the soughing winds, — as heartening as the cries of the night-watchman of ye olden time, calling out the hour, —

> "One-o'clock, and-all is-well!
> Two-o'clock! no-harm-'s-befell!
> Three-o'clock! the day-is-breaking!
> Four-o'clock! the birds-are-waking!"

This old timekeeper is our private watchman by night and by day; and, indeed, is as trusty as a house-dog. Awhile he strikes his venerable chime, hoarse from the sea fogs, and waves on the hours with his trembling hands.

He is well armed too; he carries deadly weapons. You have only to unbutton his overcoat, and out tumble a flintlock musket, a tomahawk, and a couple of rusty horse-pistols. In his inside hip-pocket lurks a desperately wicked-looking blunderbuss without a trigger.

Robin knows it well. When a detach-

ment from the village — bare-legged little pirates — swoop down on our melon patch or currant bushes, and proceed to fill their sacks with plunder, Robin runs for this blunderbuss. After a skirmish, in which Keziah is conspicuous with the rolling-pin, the enemy is put to rout with great slaughter.

Beside the pompous four-poster stands a mahogany wardrobe, time-worn, blackened with age, and of an ancient pattern. The middle division is a deep recess wherein is framed a piece of patchwork that our grandmothers called "a mirror." Here our resident ghost may behold itself at full length on any moonlight night, if it has a mind. Right and left are massive doors. One of them opens into a space so vast as to lead you to wonder whether Bluebeard's wives — all seven of them — may not have once hung from these very pegs in a gruesome row. Behind the other door are drawers and shelves befitting the wedding garments of those amiable and unfortunate ladies.

The windows of this room are mullioned, and crisscrossed with tiny panes. Their framework is uncouth, not to say obtrusive; but when you consider the grace of the dimity curtains, edged, as they are, with ball fringes of a dead-and-gone fashion, and come to loop them high to let in the blessed sunlight, you would not order them otherwise.

The garret, though, is the chief charm of this old homestead. The little schoolmistress insists it is the most sentimental and romantic thing about the house. Robin and I saw it first and saw it thoroughly that rainy day last October when we were storm-bound, played at housekeeping, and discovered the boasted "tack-me-downs."

A rambling, odd-and-even, happy-go-lucky, go-as-you-please kind of garret, that may be said to overrun the house. Here are rafters and crossbeams that would be naked enough but for the covering of dust and cobwebs. The skylights are dimmed and blurred with fallen leaves; the dormer

windows might be dead-lights or dark lanterns for all the light they give. For this their knitted hoods and raveled veils of vines are partly responsible; but leave Nature to her own devices, — to her slow and sure processes, — and you may safely intrust to her the artistic values of the most critical situation.

How we have ransacked these scutcheoned chests, — how we have rummaged the old hair trunks! Absurdly small they seem to us for the temporary needs of a woman of even a hundred years ago. Fancy such a dainty thing, studded and initialed, as it is, with brass-headed nails, and embossed on lock and hasp — fancy it consigned to any other place of transfer than the boot of the family coach of the olden time!

In one of these trunks we found a loose parcel of baby-clothes; a fragment of a waistcoat of continental cut — the pocket flap I think, and richly embroidered; an odd epaulette, a pair of spurs; and a packet of letters, time-stained, rumpled, and tied with a bit of faded ribbon.

Here are quilting-frames and candle-moulds. Beside a broken-down spinning-wheel swaggers a tipsy-looking reel, and facing it stands a rakish old hackle, grinning and mowing, — a worthy couple. Flax has been tossed upon them, like impossible wigs, never intended to fit any head. Huddled together in one corner is a litter of firedogs — a mongrel lot; while one-legged tongs and rusty shovels are hob-and-nob with a fender. A rose-water still, in the last stage of decline, lies on its back under one of the eaves. From the rafters and crossbeams dangle fish-nets and tackle; and tilted against them are oyster rakes, boathooks, and other seafaring implements, — these are Ryle's later contribution. Last of all are rusty chains that rattle and grate when the wind and the resident ghost —

Just here a parenthesis in behalf of the ghost. I may as well confess that the ghost and I are on excellent terms; for it supplies a mysterious zest and flavor to my simple life, a variety to my solitudes. The ghost

and I have formed a secret society into which the tall Dutch clock and the cat Ebenezer, only, have been admitted. Not Robin, nor yet the servants: the one being voted out as too young, and the others inimical to secret societies of all kinds. When we meet at the ingleside for a conference — the clock, the ghost, and the crickets, — did I mention the crickets? — the clock is an invaluable member; for it stands sentry in the hall-way, and sounds the alarum at approach of hostile forces.

But the parenthesis has waxed to a paragraph, and not a single word yet about the ghost which — But here come the little schoolmistress and our young rector!

CHAPTER VI.

TWO STUDIES IN CHARCOAL.

THE stately four-poster has a good and faithful servant in a warming-pan of great age, which hangs within reach, and has carried and fetched for generations. Its long wooden handle is charred and scarred in many places; the brazen face is furrowed like the face of the venerable timekeeper. The moment Robin beheld it, he marked it for his own.

"How 's that for a corn-popper, mamma? Is n't it a daisy? It 'll pop a peck in a jiffy. It 's just immense." The boy shells his corn serenely into the warming-pan, with a watchful eye upon the bed of coals.

Keziah does not approve of either of us: to put it mildly, she is furious. She fills her clay pipe with equal parts of indigna-

tion and tobacco, lights it with a flash of her snapping black eyes, and betakes herself to the smoke-house. There she seats herself upon the doorsill; and with the tail of her gown pulled carefully over her head for a mosquito bar, addresses her remarks to the burning tobacco.

"Mis' M'riar gwine spile dat chile, sho'. It 's de mussy o' de Lord he 's all de chil'en dey is on de lan'; 'ca'se it 's mons'ous little manners he 's mindin' dese days, lemme tell ye. Bed-warmers in de parlor, mine yo', an' cookin' wittles in 'em! It 's agin Scriptur'."

Mary has followed the old woman out to the smoke-house for a comfortable gossip. Mary is of a social turn.

"Go aisy, Keziah, do."

"Bed-warmers in de parlor!" — with awful distinctness, — "an' when de coals git to burnin' slow, 'count o' bein' put upon twel dey 's mos' gin out, 'Poke 'em up wid de handle, Robin, — poke 'em up wid de handle!' Nex' news, she 'll gib him Wesley's trac's for lamplighters."

She smokes so fiercely for a minute that the coals in her pipe wink fast.

"Did ye shet de kitchen do' tight arter ye, comin' out, Mary? Dat black rascal ob a cat, Eb'nezer, got his mind sot on a mossel o' chicken giblets I bin a-choppin' and gittin' ready for a stew in de mawnin'. Robin have a fit if dat cat gits dat stew."

"Thin phat 's the sinse o' lavin' it forninst the windy to timpt the dhivil himself? It 's the sinsible pussy-cat that 'll give a le'p clane through the miskaytee nits an' make a meal o' the same, the craythur."

"Skeeters is havin' a camp-meetin' shout in dese 'ere diggins dis night, sho'," says the old woman, sharply; "dere was 'nough skeeters singin' in the back po'ch, when I come out de kitchen, for a hololujah metre, widout countin' de pinchin' bugs. What yo' come traipsin' out 'ere for, anyways? 'Pears like ye mought ha' been pearter to stay whar ye come from, Mary Muldoon."

But Miss Muldoon thinks differently. She makes a bag of her apron, and ties her

frowzy head into it. This done, she pulls the wheelbarrow from behind the smoke-house, puts it close to Keziah, seats herself tailor-fashion, tucking her skirts well over her ankles, and feels as welcome as she is comfortable.

"Phat 's the sinse groomblin'? An' is it Robin ye 're afther 'busin'? An' phat 's the matter wid the b'y?"

"Ain't nuffin much matter wid *him*, it 's his maw. 'T was on'y yes'day — no 't wa'n't yes'day nuther — lemme see when 't was, — why, 't was dis mawnin', — dis blessed mawnin'. Nuffin' would n't pacify Robin but he mus' go crabbin' wid dat low-down, ornery Buster. (Ole Satin boun' to git dat Buster Bloomsb'ry yit, wid his foolin'.) 'Whar gwine git yo' crab bait?' sez I, 'wid de las' mossel o' dog meat a-bilin' dis minnit in de soup?'

"What does Mis' M'riar do — his own maw, mind yo' — but go git dé lam' chops — de Sunday-bes' chops — an' gib 'em to Robin for crab bait, she 's dat triflin'. Den

here she comes honeyin' 'round Keziah arter'ards to git her up a dinner out o' nuffin' 't all. Dat 's a ole trick o' Mis' M'riar's, mine yo'!

"Minnit I sot eyes on her comin' in de kitchen, I knowed; but sho 's yo' bawn, Keziah 's 'nough for her. To clar de trac' an' git my dander up I jes' steps on Eb'nezer's tail (dat cat's tail is powerful like a trigger), when bang! goes Eb'nezer froo de winder, right into de rice-puddin', sot out on de bench to cool.

"'Why, Keziah!' says Mis' M'riar, like she was 'stonished.

"'Oh, dat 's all right, honey,' sez I; 'dar goes de res' o' de dinner. He'p yo'se'f, Eb'nezer, to whut 's lef' in de dish,' sez I; 'dey ain't 'nough lef' to go 'round.'

"'Mussy me!' sez she; 'what we gwine do 'bout dinner now?' sez she.

"Sez I, 'I spec' I kin git some scrapin's off dat ar ham bone to fry. Den dar 's de crabs to bile, arter Robin ketches 'em; we mus' n't forgit de crabs Robin gwine to ketch,' sez I.

"She neber tetches 'em, mine yo', 'case dey dead sho to gib her de middlin' poorlys, crabs is! As for de kitchen, dey gwine to eat pizen fust."

The old woman laughs till the tears roll down her cheeks. Mary whirls her arms about her head like a windmill in a storm.

"The miskayties is afther havin' me ate, the villins. Shoo! whish — sh!" and the precious pipe is sent spinning through mid-air like a clay pigeon.

The smoker is sober in an instant; she regards the luckless Mary with looks of rage and disgust.

"Jes' lemme cotch yo' tryin' to knock my head off, Mary Muldoon! Git 'long wid you into de house, whar yo' b'longs. Who axed yo' out here, anyways?"

Keziah clutches her mosquito bar with one hand, and shakes her fist.

"It 's de mussy o' de Lord if dat blessed pipe ain't all broke up to smash an' grains. I 'spise a fool. Leetle wuss, an' ye won't be fittin' company for a tukkey-buzzard."

Mary loosens the bow-knots into which she has so carefully tied herself, and slips off the wheelbarrow.

"Whisht, Keziah! go aisy; here 's daddy Driggus," — in a hurried whisper, — "an' it 's mesilf that 'll foind the poipe intirely. How 's uncle Laz'rus?" turning to the newcomer with great cordiality; "for pardon's sake, don't shtep a shtep till I" —

The girl gropes about the grass on hands and knees, patting the turf in places.

"Beloike it give a le'p forninst the fince," — peering beneath and behind it. "Bedad, thin, an' it 's mesilf has it, an' divil the warse for the slip."

A figure done in charcoal looms out of the shadows, and pauses before the smokehouse door, — a figure bowed with the burden of age and long service, stooping, and bearing grievously upon a staff. He lifts his hat with an old-time grace that well becomes his white hairs and venerable mien.

"Ladies, your sarvant! an' wishin' ye de highest degree o' salute. Howdy, sister Keziah, — howdy?"

"On'y tol'ble, praise de Lawd! How 's yo'se'f, brer Laz'rus?"

"Po'ly, ma'am, po'ly. De shakes an' de rheum'tiz ain't de bes' o' frien's in de bes' o' wedders; but I 'clar' for it, dis las' 'tack o' miz'ry has 'bout wore me to fiddlestrings."

The old man finds in the crown of his hat a startling bandanna, with which he mops his face.

"Jes' let airy one o' dem symptoms kitch a-holt o' yo' jints an' start 'em to *cree*-kin; jes' wait twel de marrer gits to dribblin' out yo' bones, an' yo' whole systence is right nat'rally 'ranged, — better quit wrastlin' right dar. Better jes' tie up yo' leetle passel to wunst, an' git ready for de chariot when it calls, an' den step in an' go up to glory."

"Ain't dat a nice hankercher, Mary?" says Keziah, with an amiable desire to distract his thoughts; "air it yaller, or air it red? My ole eyes don't 'mount to much, but it feels sof' as silk. It 's gwine to make a lubly head-hankercher some o' dese days, arter brer Laz'rus done wid it."

This delicate hint is lost on their visitor. He folds the bandanna evenly, smoothing out the wrinkles, and restores it to its place with deliberation. This done, he balances his staff carefully in a niche near the smoke-house door, settles himself comfortably on his half of the doorsill, and groans piously.

"Afflictions is wery prev'lent dis season, ladies. M-m! M-m! Fustly an' fo'mostly dar wus de Baptis' meetin'-'ouse kitch afire de bery nex' day arter de spring cleanin'. Shuh! Me an' brer Bim'lech could ha' stomped it out easy as wink one eye; but oh, no! dat ain't no kind o' ways to put a fire out. Fotch in de hose an' de injines, — dat 's de way; slosh de warter ober de pews an' de pulpit; slommuk up de whitewash walls, 'ca'se ye can 'pend on Laz'rus Driggus to slick 'em up 'gin. He 's got 'ligion, Laz'rus has; he ain't none o' de sprinkled kind, — he 's been dipped. So pass 'long de water buckets an' de hose, brer Bim'lech." The old man is so overcome by the nature of his reflections that he groans again and wipes his eyes.

"An' niver a rid cint to ye for the elbow grease?" Mary asks, with concern.

"Elbow grease, honey? Not much, 'scusin' a hunk o' fat pork an' a cold tater an' de trashy eend of a corn dumplin' and de dreenin's o' de teapot. An' it 's 'Sot right down whar you is, ole man! no use gwine home to git yo' dinner.' Tarvern po'ch, ladies, mind ye; and de eas' wind a-borin' holes in yo' ole karkis for to let in de shakes an' de rheum'tiz!" The old man stretches out his withered, work-worn hand with a piteous gesture.

Mary's tender heart is stirred. There is a sudden discharge of syllables to be found in no tongue but Mary's. Keziah's gutturals and mutterals are equally effective. The old man permits himself to be consoled. He clasps his shrunken knees and continues, —

"Neber you fret, honey. It 's de Lawd A'mighty dat 's gwine settle dat little bill for Laz'rus Driggus, an' dis chile ain't a-gittin' hisself into no puspisperation a-groanin', — no, sah! Trus' de Lawd A'mighty to settle it for Laz'rus."

The old man gazes solemnly at the women as he makes this profession of faith. Keziah's mutterals take on a softened tone. Lazarus continues, —

"Arter de meetin'-'ouse gits onto its legs agin, Gen'ral Dalrymple 'lows dat his back fence is a-peelin', an' nary a widjel but Laz-'rus gwine lay a finger to it."

Keziah smokes in short sentences, and grunts approval. The old man winks comfortably, and addresses his further remarks to some invisible being.

"Yes, sah. Well, sah, I gits me to work 'mejit. I mixes me up de bucket o' whitewash, and I sets it on de cellar door to sizzle. Den I slicks up my breshes an' I packs my dinner-pail, all handy for de mawnin'.

"'Fore de broke o' day, here comes 'long de rheum'tiz. Fust it cotch me in de spine o' my backbone, — it cotch me, sah, an' gimme a twis'; an' den, oh, Lawdy mussy! den I knowed for sartain de debbil broke loose an' come to town. Bimeby de shakes

tunes up an' dances a jig; rheum'tiz jines in wid a wicious wiggle, twel — I ain't tellin' yer no lie — dar wus skurce 'nough lef' o' Laz'rus Driggus to make a 'spectable fun'ral."

"Dat las' 'tack done yo' good, anyhow," says Keziah, encouragingly. "Me an' Mary was 'sputin' 'bout ye as ye was comin' down de lane. Gittin' as spry an' sassy as a lizard, wid dat spankin'-new walkin'-stick. Whar yo' git dat stick fum, uncle?"

The old man takes his staff in both hands, and smoothes the handle affectionately.

"Gen'l Jawnson gimme dis; it 's sho' 'nough hick'ry. De gen'l is out an' out qual'ty, yo' better b'lieve. He ain't none o' dem light an' triflin' no 'count sal'ratus biskits made up wid skim milk and a dab o' pork-drippin' for short'nin's, — no, sah! He 's de kind dat 's riz wid yeas' dat was riz 'fore dat, — dah 's qual'ty for ye! Plenty o' cream in him, an' de wery bestest Firginny flour; baked slow an' stiddy, wid a lubly upper crust onto him; — dat 's Gen'l Jawnson."

The portrait is drawn to the life; the women are mute with wonder. The artist is conscious of a leap in their esteem, and is proportionately consequential.

He searches his pockets and finds a small round box. This he shakes gently, and taps twice or thrice according to rule. After an impressive pause, he uncovers it and offers its contents to Keziah.

"He'p yo'se'f to a pinch, ma'am, an' den bust out a-weepin'. I reckon yo' 'll find dat 's quality, too!"

The box is of metal, white and glistering. The lady sidles up close, and examines the precious object by the light of her pipe; she is profoundly moved, but had rather perish than say so.

"'Pears like it mought be silver, Laz'rus; is yo' sho' 't ain't washed?"

The old man rolls his yellow eyeballs till they gleam. He tries to speak, but words come slowly.

"Wash! M-m, h-m! Wash! Woman, whar yo' git yo' fotch-up dat yo' dunno

wash fum solid? Wus yo' de las' pickin's o' de cohnfield, or did yo' come out'n de ma'sh?"

His hostess surveys him with bitter cold dignity.

"Don't yo' dar' to look at me in dat tone o' woice, Laz'rus Driggus; I objec's to it. For a 'fessin' Christian, an' one dat 's been dipped, yo' gits yer dander up mons'ous easy. Fotch-up? M-m, h-m! Fotch-up! I want yer to un'erstan', 'stinctly, dat all yo' say *I* is, *you is 'em.* Yo' 'spec's me to b'lieve" —

"For pardon's sake, go aisy," prays Mary; "it 's chrazy ye are, I doubt. Whisht, now!"

"He 'spec's me to b'lieve de gen'l gib him dat snuff-box too, an' a kag o' snuff to go wid it,"— hotly; "nex' news it 'll be a gold toofpick an' a black silk brumberill! Huh! I reckon it' s nigh 'bout time I sot my muffles for breakwhish. . . . Who 's dat hollerin' up yonder dis time o' night?"

An electric figure appears in the kitchen

doorway, and a clear young voice comes thrilling through the stillness.

"Keziah! O Keziah! I 've got something good for you."

Robin's words turn the current of the two vessels of wrath. The aged vessel restores his treasures to their slits and spaces, reaches for his staff, and with an effort gets upon his feet again.

"De bes' o' frien's mus' part, ma'am. 'Scusin' de liberty, I must fall to risin'!"

The other vessel, but by no means the weaker, rises to the occasion. She removes the mosquito bar, — by this time a wreck, — readjusts her "head-hankercher," shakes out her apron, and faces him.

"Better look out 'bout dat solid silver snuff-box, brer Driggus, when de chariot calls; ole sarpent powerful cunnin'. If yo' ain't keerful when yo' ties it up into dat leetle passel dat 's gwine up to glory wid yo', it mought drap eendwise out'n de corner!"

CHAPTER VII.

ANDY.

This dear old house lies so near the shore of our little stream that its very feet bathe daily in the flowing tide; so near that when Goldbarr's prize geese break jail on the other side and come scuffling across to seek their fortune, I can toss into their gaping throats luscious morsels without so much as stirring from my old Dutch chair on the veranda.

Their leader is a pompous old graybeard; he wears spectacles, and lisps. They bob their forelocks, and dip to me old-fashioned courtesies. I make my acknowledgments with both hands extended.

In their struggles to-day to gobble up more than is good for them, they forget the enemy is upon them. Robin is in their

wake, poling his sharpie. He whisks off his cap and hails me.

"Hollo! Chuck us a few!"

I have a lapful of buns. I aim for the cap, and fling several into it cleverly.

"Good shot!" cries the boy. He makes a mouthful of the biggest bun, crams the rest into his pistol pocket, — that dearest joy of all short breeches, — and makes for the geese. They suddenly see the error of their ways, and, with one quack, turn tail. They want no more buns, — not they; they want to go home.

Robin dashes after them, making the air dense and yet denser with coils of rope, chum, crab-bait, — anything, by way of argument.

I watch the chase with pain and grief, for my sympathies are all with the fugitives. The enemy is gaining upon them; he has nearly clutched the hindmost, an ancient gander, and a mighty bird of valor. With a desperate lunge, the boy comes sprawling across the boat. Over goes the crab-basket,

out swarm the crabs, and into the stream goes Robin with unhappy dispatch.

"Oh, blame it!" he groans; "what a go!"

The geese rend the air with yells of laughter. They make great mouths at him, and are in an ecstasy.

Poor Robin! He gathers himself up, gazes ruefully at the last one of his precious crabs as it scrambles over the stern, seizes the oarlock, and swings himself in again, — a sorry, shabby likeness of himself.

I would not laugh, for a fortune; on the contrary, I call the corners of my mouth to order, make a trumpet with both hands, and shout with all my breath, "Robin! Robin! how about Fetch and the beach wagon and the 'Home' boys and a run to Ocean Beach?"

"All right, m'm, and we 'll take Andy."

Three good strokes bring the sharpie ashore, where it is made fast above high-water mark. Suddenly down he drops behind the boat. Should Ryle Ryerson see

him now, life henceforth were not worth the living. Ryle is crossing the bridge with a wheelbarrow-load of clams; they are for the House of Goldbarr. His back is turned to the boy, but not till the old fisherman is out of sight does Robin show any sign of life.

Presently there rushes past me a young hurricane of wind and wet, scattering in all directions the buns, and overturning my half-won game of Patience. Over they go, and away goes Robin, slip-slopping the hall and stairs, all heedless of Mary's lamentations.

"Arrah, begorra, ye bad b'y! an' me joost afther scroobin' 'em agin Soonday. Wait till I ketch yer!"

If Mary waits till then, my little man is safe. He has winning ways, has Robin. He has only to cuddle up close, and call her by the sweet baby-name he gave her when he was a small scrap in her arms, and he may have her loving blue eyes for marbles, and welcome.

Among our gentle friends at the Seaside

Home, none so gentle and sweet as the little hunchback, Andy. A scanty scrap of humanity is he, — a morsel of deformity. But what a face! How pathetic of suffering; how eloquent of suffering overcome!

Who can read between the lines of his sensitive mouth? Who can read the lesson of heroic resolve, of patience, of resignation? Eyes wherein there is no guile; eyes that are earnest, faithful, and loving; eyes with power given them to see beyond the weeping and the waiting. A brow that will wear a crown of rejoicing one day, as manifest as the Peace of God that rests upon it now.

He is but nine years old — nine steps in the scale of life. Faltering steps are they, not one of which could count for good measure. When we lift him into his place on the driver's seat beside the giant Robin, he looks the wraith of Tiny Tim!

Robin is very gentle with Andy; he intrusts to him the ends of the reins, and even the whip when Fetch lapses into a revery.

The little fellow is almost overwhelmed by his responsibilities. He asks questions, and ventures his own small views till his face is aflame with excitement and glee. My tender-hearted boy is always mindful of that dreadful hunch; he puts his helpful arm around the little body, and cuddles him sidewise.

Andy likes best the drive to Moratika. This is a hamlet five miles east of us, on the bay shore, — a cluster of rude huts on the water's edge, wherein such homely arts as seine netting and carpet weaving are plied in winter time, when sea craft is of scant avail.

In the smallest of these huts dwells a little old gentlewoman whom the country folk call aunt Dorothy. Her house is an asylum, a hospital, a life-saving station; the hapless, the homeless, and the hungry find shelter and succor within her gates.

She is a woman for whom adversity and the contradiction of sinners decreed an empty, useless life, but whose great heart and

pure spirit are stronger than fate: a woman of faculty; patient, reasonable, untiring; whose nearest friends are among the friendless, and who holds the lives of many in the hollow of her slender hand.

The shiftless and the incapable are the "Lord's little ones," she says, and must be treated with distinction. Hot and savory food served on porcelain and fair linen is barely worthy of such guests; nothing common nor unclean may be offered. It is one of the cardinal principles of her life that vice and vagrancy are not checked by a diet of broken victuals served on broken platters; nor can she be convinced of the expediency of refuse for diseased bodies. Outcasts from love and trust and joy must be nourished and cherished and comforted; and always at such feasts, she, the Lord's handmaiden, girds herself and serves them.

Our little hunchback is her heart's delight. As soon as we arrive she takes possession of him, and exhibits with pride the latest addition to her family. This time it

happens to be a decrepit old mastiff, which once had been shot and left for dead, had crept to her door from far away and knocked, had been welcomed, soothed, and healed. He is now in charge of three blind mites that will some day grow up to be kittens.

The mastiff, the kittens, and other cripples form a body-guard about the dear old lady; they protect her with their lives and fortune.

The little lad is in his heart akin to these forlorn creatures, — he knows just what to say to them; they look into his eyes and know he is their friend. Even the small wild things of the woods come to him easily and nestle in his arms; they never question his good-fellowship.

Our visit ended, aunt Dorothy remembers a certain earthen jar on the top shelf in her wee storeroom. This is hauled down and rummaged; the result is a paper bag of goodies for Andy, including cakes in ravishing variety.

To see that frail little claw fumbling for

the cake with a raisin in it, — to see it remove the raisin and put it back into the deepest depth of the bag (for this is too precious to be eaten recklessly); to see him in silent meditation between the mouthfuls, and know he is blessing each one with a special grace, like little birds drinking; to see him guard the precious crumbs in that morsel of a calico handkerchief, whose border is glorious with every known letter of the alphabet, and then furtively and wistfully devour each crumb when nobody is looking, — ah, the pathos of it!

As we drive through the gateway and over the grounds up to the Home, Andy has the reins. He is drawn up to his full height, — how big he feels! The boys and girls crowd about, eager to be of use, — to hold Fetch's head, to carry in the parcels, and, above all, to lift Andy down. Then we linger till the little fellow has invited a dozen or more of his best friends to a lawn party at Ingleside for Tuesday afternoon.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GARDEN PARTY.

THERE was no garden party on Tuesday for Andy. Rain, mist, fog, east winds, and other rowdies made up a surprise party, and invited themselves to Ingleside for the day. They had a good time, and so did we; these boisterous, rough-weather creatures are cronies of ours.

The little people at the Home have had to wait till to-day for their fun; but the day is worth waiting for. Nature has had her face washed till it shines; her tresses have a golden sheen from the sunlight; her perfumes are as delicate as the breezes that waft them.

As I sit on the piazza, shaking hands with myself for being alive, something with a round head and plump body comes hurt-

ling through the open, and bounces into my lap. The thing may be an exhilarated champagne cork, but it feels like a certain dear boy I know.

"Owch! who you pinching? Nathan 's back from the Home, Mamma, and the children are coming at four, so that 's fixed."

"Delightful! Where shall we put the table for this party?"

The champagne cork is sober directly; that round head can be relied on in matters of business.

"Lemme see. Not in the house, we settled that last time. Piazza won't do either — everybody squinched up, and everything bundling into the dirt; no, indeedy."

"Never you mind calling my best veranda names, sir; it is a very particular friend of mine. How about the big apple-tree?"

"Good. Nathan can swing the gypsy kettle there; and we 'll have a clambake, — you promised, you know. And oh, yes! sure enough, I most forgot 'Aunt Sally.' We 've got to have 'Aunt Sally,' whatever else we don't have."

"But, my blessed son, there is n't time to make her, — that should have been done yesterday."

"Time! Why, oceans of time; Mary 'll help, and we can do it in two winks. All we want is the biggest bolster, and two pillows for arms, and I 'll tease Keziah to lend us one of her old duds, — dresses, I mean, — the one she wears wash-days."

"Lucky you brought that old false-face from home," I say; "and Mary must get out her fly-flap bonnet: that will give the old lady quite an air of distinction; mind you tie it on tight."

"Yes, and all we 'll have to buy for the whole thing is the clay pipe; get one for a cent. Buster 'll go to the store for it. 'Aunt Sally' is the greatest game out."

"How will you contrive to stand her up?" I ask.

"Easy, for we 'll sit her down, — set her in an armchair. The Fitz-Jenkins's 'Aunt Sally' went all wobbly, — she would n't stand up any which-a-way; looked like an

old drunken woman going off to the station-house."

"Well, well, I 'm willing. But you and Nathan must be sure to build the camp-fire and start it first thing after dinner; by four o'clock there 'll be a bed of coals fit for a barbecue."

"What 's a barbecue?" demands this small person; "a barbecue! huh! I guess not! Tell you what, though," — with a sudden thought: "we 'll cook flapjacks on my new griddle. Now, lovely mamsey, don't go and make a fuss, we can do it just as ea-sy. Stir 'em up in the watering-pot — the new big one, you know, — and they 'll pour through the spout like a blue streak; and Buster is going to fry 'em, — no trouble about Buster. Talk about picnics!" with an ecstatic squeal.

"But wait a minute, Robin, I don't understand. Do you mean my new watering-pot, — my new one?"

"Why, yes, m'm," — ingenuously; "old one 's no good — it 's busted; got a hole in it, — a norful big one, — and the batter 'd

leak out quicker 'n scat! You can take the sprinkler out, though; we only want the spout."

"Take the sprinkler out!" I echo helplessly.

The boy bursts into peals of laughter; he laughs till he whoops. Then, without a note of warning, he throws his heels high over his head and walks on his hands to the fence, where he hooks himself to the top rail by his toes. Before I can cry out to him, he has pulled his supple body into shape again with a comical twist, and is making disrespectful faces at his mother, — this good comrade of mine.

"This kind of a day puts lots of pop into a fellow. Hullo! here 's a good one;" and over he goes like the down of a thistle.

"Now, Robin, listen to me, and leave the rest of the popovers till the children come. Here comes the tea-table, so please postpone all monkeyshines. If everything is to happen out-doors, everybody must fetch and carry."

When Andy gives a party at Ingleside, our handmaidens are angels and ministers of grace; but not Nathan. We regret to admit he is not in harmony with "pamperin' up a lot o' beggars." So he swings the gypsy pot with an ill grace, and drags the precious tea-table over the grass by one leg in a cruel manner; scowls and sniffs and looks dangerous.

The women have their opinion of Nathan; they heap coals of wrath on his offensive head by crowding good things, more and yet more, upon this long-suffering and much put-upon table. They never run so gladly as when they run for the Lord's little ones. They are of kin with aunt Dorothy. Great, honest, bountiful hearts are theirs, — merciful, loving, and kind.

This is to be Andy's party; come to think of it, most of them are Andy's. The little hunchback sits at one end of the long table in high state. You might not perceive him at all but for the friendly boosting of hair pillows, and the bracing of a wooden settle turned up endwise.

The little fellow believes himself to be at such times a potentate, enthroned, and surrounded by loyal subjects. And so he is, poor little lad! It is very touching, the homage he receives from them all.

The tea-table is as imposing as the host himself. It is dressed in its finest finery, is worldly minded and wealthy.

Buster is ubiquitous; he minds the clam-bake and other cookery, while the company mind him. His helpful loving-kindness at these times is a pretty touch in his rough boy-nature; although, in truth, who could ever be rough with Andy? When he lifts his eyes with quiet gaze, and shows the depth and breadth of Heaven's peace within, we catch the radiance of his spiritual face, and our own eyes are without a shadow.

Sister Angelica comes too; it could not be a real party without Sister Angelica. The boys are hauled up to "make their manners" to the lady. They make them with shy and gentle grace, heads hung low and eyes downcast.

They recover themselves by and by, when flapjacks are flying in the air, and "Aunt Sally's" pipe declines to come to terms upon any terms.

I like boys. They hit out from the shoulder, and they never flinch when bogus pipes and Aunt Sally's and other humbugs are to be punished.

The boys go into the games with heart and soul; it would do yours good to see them. As for me, I am not watching them just now. I am rapt in contemplation of a beard that is wafting to and fro in the evening breeze; it is to windward of Andy.

Of all beards that ever grew to deface a mortal man, this beard is the most grewsome; just that, — grewsome. It belongs to our good doctor, who is coming over the lawn. A certain School of Philosophy teaches us that all spontaneous outgrowths of nature reveal their divine impulse, and are instinct with sublimity. I palsy my wits with conjecture as to the sublimity in the doctor's beard.

His name, however, *is* sublime. It is not a syllable less than Chrysantho Pestolido, — a name that concerns the unlettered folk in this parish as little as his birthplace and pedigree. To them he is "Dr. Pestle," or even "old Pestle," and comes from "furrin" parts! He is a native of Corfu, a man of accomplishments and ability, a philosopher, a poet, a scholar, and a gentleman.

And yet, with all his culture, he is not unhappy here. He does not chafe at his bonds of poverty and obscurity, does not disdain his meed of homely loaves and fishes, but adjusts his walk and conversation to the gauge of his environments.

When Andy is host we are as sure of the doctor as of the party itself. The little hunchback is the tender nerve in his heart. A curious relation exists between these two. The child is elder brother, counselor, conscience keeper; the man protests, argues, — surrenders. The child can solve so easily the problems of death and life, faith and duty, — problems that the earnest man

continues to search out carefully, and with tears.

When our good doctor is here, Andy's crutch is laid aside. He lifts the crumpled form to a snug crotch in his shoulder, bidding him "catch hold anywhere," and then marches off like a grenadier. Now you see the man at his very best.

Andy does exactly as he is told. He "holds on" with a deathless grip — by the doctor's tawny thatch, by his ears, by the immortal beard, if needs be. The children fall into line at the word of command, and "forward march."

"Where now, old man?"

"Feed the pigs," is the prompt order; "and Buster 'll carry the pail. Come along, Buster."

"Here, honey," says a wholesome voice at Buster's elbow, — "here! holt yo' pail close up, an' fotch along dese flapjacks. Flop 'em in, sonny; an' here 's a mossel o' corndodgers, too, jes' to put dere mouf in tas'. Dem pigs ain't been fed sence de las' time; I saved 'em up a puppose for Andy."

The pigs are delightful; they show off to order like prize babies. They are as sensitive to flattery as our horse, Fetch, and they deserve even more; for there is a gilt edge to their arts and graces which he may never hope to attain. Fetch is a thoroughbred, and we admire him much; but the palpable fact remains that he gobbles a lump of sugar at one snap, while either of those gourmets — yclept pigs — will take a peppermint in three nibbles, and never drop a grain!

The children hang over the top rails of the sty by their eyelids. If they wink once, they are lost.

Prize babies, indeed! They are nothing less than living wonders, those pigs. Whether they settle themselves on their hind legs for a little conversation, or wink one ear to point a joke, or cover their faces with both paws in paroxysms of peek-a-boo, 't is all one. They are living wonders, and their names are Nip and Tuck.

"Shake hands, Nip. Shake a paw, sir!" and Andy extends his own. Tuck has half

a mind to shake it himself, being of a grasping disposition, but nudges his fellow and yields to him the palm. Nip performs his best courtesy, and pledges his visitor handsomely.

The boys are uproarious ; this is something like. But hold on a minute.

"Up with you, — up, you black rascal! Make a speech."

The living wonders climb up on their hind legs, clear their throats, and, with Robin as interpreter, begin : —

"Would somebody kindly get the rake from behind the barn door, and scratch gently? Not there, a little farther down, — so! ah, thanks, de-licious!" and over they go like a couple of ninepins. Over they go on their sleek sides, eyes closed, their very tails out of crimp in the abandon of the moment. "Good grief! but it 's 'eavenly."

It is the little hunchback who wields the rake. He was lifted down from the doctor's shoulder long ago, and has a reserved seat on the trough. Those sleek sides know him well.

Nip and Tuck are not the only living wonders at Ingleside; there are also Bang and the billy-goat.

"You go, Buster," says Robin, "and untie Billy; *he* won't buck you." Robin would go for him himself, but if they are to have a race, he has to set up the hurdles.

Buster is not so sure about that billy-goat; but —

"Buck! huh! only let him try it on, that 's all," — with a careless swagger. Nobody could suspect those sturdy knees of quaking as he goes in quest of the brute.

"Grass is all a muck from the rain," croaks Nathan, who appears on the scene with the milk-pail; he and another living wonder will have a confidential interview presently.

Sister Angelica hopes the children will not get their feet wet, and thinks may be they better wait till another fair day. Robin's own are turned up immediately for inspection.

"Feet wet? Fiddle! Just as dry as chips; feel 'em! Nathan 's an old fuss."

Wet or dry, the prayers in these upturned faces are not to be withstood. Here come Bang and Billy, careering over one another; we guess the grass is pretty dry! We 'll risk it.

This is a race as is a race.

"Hie on, Bang! Go it, Billy! Hip, hip, hur-ra-ay!" The boys would holloa louder, if their throats were bigger.

"Billy 's ahead! I bet on Billy." Bets are running ruinously high.

"Bang 's ahead! Look out there! How 's that for a jump? Hie on, Bang!" The excitement is intense.

"Bang 's got it! Bang 's got it! Hur-ra-a-ay!" The cheers are deafening. "Good Bang! Good dog!" and all hands are stretched out to pat the victor. Bang is used to praise. He wags applause in his own behalf quite naïvely.

Sister Angelica says she is sure the children would like to see Robin's little bantams, if it made nobody any trouble.

"Trouble! No trouble 't all; they 're

right behind the dairy." The children are nearly out of breath with shouting, but they scamper after Robin with all speed.

"They 're keeping house here all by themselves," Robin says; "Nathan built their coop, — is n't it fine? See, Andy, the little mother is bobbing 'How do' to you."

Andy bobs too. "What darling little chicks!"

"Did you ever see baby quail, Andy? These little fellows are like baby quail, exactly." Andy has no remembrance of quail, big or little, but he thinks they must be — exactly.

"But wait till you see my little ducky-daddles. I 've got nine of 'em. Here they are! nine of 'em; are n't they just too cute for anything?"

The ducks are spending the summer at a watering place in the vicinity of the dairy.

"We had eleven, but the cat got two. Ebenezer got more than the ducks when Keziah found him out, — he got a licking that 'll last him for one while. Keziah held

him by the tail and whaled him; she beat him with a black-gum switch."

"Poor kitty!" cries a loving heart; "poor old kit, he did n't know no better."

"Did n't he though? well, he knows better *now*," says downright Robin, "and he is n't going to forget it in a hurry."

"Where 's their mother?" Andy asks.

"Have n't any. The old hen got run over by a great lumbering farm wagon, — could n't get out of the way of it fast enough; ducks don't make very good mothers, you see,"— airing his small knowledge with effect. "After that happened, Keziah said she 'd bring 'em up herself."

"And does she?" The children are eagerly curious.

"Indeed she does; I wonder she don't tread on 'em sometimes, they 're under her feet so."

"But what ails their feet? they 're all made in one piece, sort o'."

"Oh, that 's all right," the showman assures them with a superior air; "they swim

with them. Don't you want to take them up in your hands?" he adds kindly; "you won't hurt 'em; only see how funny and soft they feel."

The children make nests of their laps, and hold out trembling hands to take the downy little things.

"Look out, Andy," exclaims the doctor, "you 'll drop 'em. Here, my boy, here 's my soft hat; it 'll make the nicest kind of nest."

Who can measure the joy of these afternoons for these children? What a rich reaping of all good things is ours for so slight a sowing of human kindness!

The gentle sister says it is growing late, and sister Dorothea will wonder what has become of them. The children come up to "the lady" (they are not so dreadfully bashful this time), and "make their manners" all over again. "The lady" lifts the little hunchback up on her lap, and tells his friends their thanks must all be given to Andy.

The little lad lends himself at once to the sentiment of the occasion: he is sure they have all had a good time, he has had such a good time himself.

Their "manners" being made to the satisfaction of everybody, the old doctor presents arms to the little fellow. The look of trust and love in both their faces is beautiful. The man bends low to lift him, and when he rises to his feet again, Andy is on the broad shoulder that has carried him so often and so well, his poor little arm tightly clasped about the other's head. They lead the procession as always, the good sister and the little schoolmistress and Mr. Armstrong bringing up the rear.

Dear little Andy! Better arms than these and stronger shall bear thee up and away one day. Patience, dear lad! patience! God's Angel of Life hath already been given charge concerning thee!

CHAPTER IX.

AN AFTERNOON TEA.

WHAT a place to enjoy a storm is Ingleside! It is as snug and safe as a lighthouse off the coast.

To-day the winds and waves are wild with glee, blowing great blasts of discord and rioting madly. Robin and I are as hilarious as they. We scan the clouds that are black and blue from the pummeling the winds are giving them; we bare our heads to the first big drops, and when the deluge comes, we run for our lives. It is glorious!

The little schoolmistress passed us awhile ago on her way to the bluff. We called to her and protested, and entreated her hospitably, but in vain; she just flashed a happy glance from her bonny gray eyes, shook her bright head, and darted away.

"Hear the thunder! it 's grand! And suppose it does rain, who minds a wetting with a sky like that? Don't say a word, — I 've *got* to see it all!" The girl is as wild as any killdee, when a storm is gathering.

The wind is in a gale, and the rain drives in slanting sheets. We snub noses against the window that commands the bluff, and are sure Miss Ethel ran under cover at Ryle's.

Robin prays fervently that I let him jump into his tights and out of the house for a shower-bath, — a caper I will not hear of. My boy can't for the life of him see why he never can do like other boys, but — "Hullo! here they are, see 'em run! It 's Mr. Armstrong!"

"Ethel, Ethel, you foolish child; what on earth!" I shout to them from the open door as we strive to hold it. "Run in, run! Whew!" and the door is wrenched from our grasp by some wanton wind, and thrown rudely back upon its hinges.

"Don't scold, please; we could n't help

it. Mr. Armstrong was out in his catboat when the squall struck him, and he had an awful time getting in, — perfectly awful. I saw the last of the struggle, and indeed for a minute I thought I had seen the last of him."

There is a hysterical break in her voice as she laughs and talks in a breath.

"Nonsense, not a bit of it," he says lightly, laughing with her; "I saw it coming, and but for that cantankerous old centreboard" —

"Well, never mind centreboards or anything else but these wet clothes," breaks in the careful housewife. "Speaking of waterspouts, there is but one thing to be done with you, Mr. Armstrong, and that is 'Go home, sir,' as we say to Bang. It 's holding up a bit, and I am going to set you afloat again, for Robin's tennis suit is never going to fit you in this wicked world."

"Don't be too sure of that," he retorts, with a merry twinkle in his handsome eyes. "I 've been in a tighter fix than in Robin's tennis suit."

Robin measures those clerical limbs with his longest look, and doubts it exceedingly.

"But you can't come in, all the same; you can't, because I 'm not going to let you. You 'll come back to tea, though?"

"Can't be done, ma'am; work to do to-night. I must n't, really."

"Yes, but soft crabs, really, — soft crabs, you know, and johnnykins. If it is n't johnnykins, it 's Maryland biscuits, crisp — and brown — and hot; are you listening?"

"No."

"And fresh butter, just churned, with not so much as a taint of salt in it; how does that sound?"

"Beguiling."

"Keziah 's a saint to-day," puts in the small host, judicially. "She went to the shout last night, so she 's rolling out the moonshines that thin you can see right through any of 'em."

"I am afraid, ma'am, — if you will excuse me — I shall be obliged" — the man speaks the words slowly — "to accept!"

"Hurry away, then. As for you, Ethel, you poor drowned baby, Keziah shall put you first in her big tin colander, and hang you afterwards on a peg to drip; we 'll manage you."

When the storm is ended and the schoolmistress reappears in one of my best gowns, and the brilliant, buoyant sunshine is making an electric nimbus about the beautiful face of nature, we all rush out, and at once become a part of the universal jubilation. Everything has burst out laughing, and everything is talking at once, including the birds. Even the fish in the stream have exceeded their gifts and are playing at leap-frog; and as to the frogs themselves, they are laughing at the burlesque till they are hoarse.

The schoolmistress lingers in the arbor to watch the rainbow; there the rector finds her. He is superlative in a worldly minded coat, whose cut is as unclerical as the loose collar and silken scarf that are about his shapely throat. The conventions of his

calling — the mint, anise, and cummin — seem to this honest man to be of small account. The weightier matters of the law, — cleanliness, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity, — these things are his priestly garments.

Our young rector even dares to believe that the measure of a man's fervor in spiritual things need not always be indicated by the amount of clear starch in his linen.

"The storm has set me to thinking, and I 'm weaving an allegory to tell my boys, Mr. Armstrong," says the little schoolmistress, pointing to the rainbow. "Does n't that arch seem an arch of triumph, the triumph of a battle won? I 've thought out already a tale of chivalry, — all about mail-clad warriors and the clang of armor; the clash of battle-axe and spear, the flash of burnished shield, the blast of bugles."

"I 'm coming to school that day, Miss Ethel!"

"No boys admitted over twelve," she says, coloring. "Besides, my battle is go-

ing to end as this has ended — in perfect peace!"

"In perfect peace — like this," he murmurs; the minister will wax sentimental, if he is not careful.

After some musing she says softly, "If I could only scale the heights of that arch of triumph and find its keystone in Heaven! But I was never a nimble climber at best; I am apt to stumble sadly."

As she speaks, her eyes are eloquent. She leans against the trellis, one arm intertwined with the blush roses that cluster and climb above her head.

"Look there!" she cries; "is n't it beautiful?"

"It is indeed, most beautiful," — but the man is not looking at the rainbow; there is a quality in his tone that makes her glance at him quickly.

"Don't," she falters, the blood streaming into her fair face and neck, — "please don't; and you would n't if you could know how dreadfully silly I feel in all this borrowed finery."

The rector turns abruptly from the girl, and performs an obeisance to a figure in the foreground: a salaam most profound.

"Enter, gracious sovereign! I salute the hem of your — tea-gown! Permit me to offer you all the hospitalities of this wet settle, — pray be seated."

"Good boy," I say, not heeding this flourish, — "good boy, to come. And *I* have come to tell you tea is ready, ditto soft crabs. Have either of you seen that boy of mine? Robin! — you Rob-in!" and two sturdy legs are seen twinkling over the clover lot, Bang at his heels.

"What a boy you are!" I cry, trying to frown but not succeeding very well. "Look at your poor forehead; and all these wet curls. My blessed boy! how dreadfully warm you are! Where have you been?"

"Why, mamma, Nip and Tuck got out of the pen somehow, — Nathan must have left the garden gate open. Bang and I have had an awful time chasing 'em back, — have n't we, you old rowdy-dow?"

"Your shoes too! I thought they were too beautiful to last."

"Don't beat him this time, for my sake," the minister begs; "Robin intends to leave off all his wicked ways forevermore with his wet shoes — I see it in his eyes — and lead a correct life, — eh, Robin?"

An arm is slipped through mine, and a flushed cheek snuggles close to my elbow for all answer. Thus is discipline maintained at Ingleside.

What a pretty thing is this bare tea-table in the west window of our home-room! Its happiest bits of color are the truant sunbeams that should be abed and asleep by this time. They have loitered behind the others for a last game of hide and seek with the shadows of the linden leaves. The hoydens are chasing one another all over our very best doilies, and making faces at themselves in the shining mahogany; together they are the prettiest decorations of the table. The minister looks at the girl in the simple white gown, with the sweet-briar in

her girdle, — looks at her with both eyes and all his heart, and does n't agree with me at all.

"What exquisite raspberries!" she says; "are n't they velvety?"

"Aunt Dorothy sent them to mamma out of her own garden," — Robin is apt to speak up in meeting. "Dr. Pestolido brought them. He had little Andy in the buggy with him. It 's just a wonder if they got back before the rain."

"What a sweet old shepherdess in rare old Dresden she is!" the minister says, helping himself to a crab; "I love aunt Dorothy."

"That does n't fit," says Miss Ethel with decision. "Try again; nothing brittle or artificial about that beautiful old woman."

"And I love somebody else ardently," he goes on composedly, as he picks out the "dead men," and proceeds to emphasize the crab with a suggestion of cayenne, — "I love another," — the schoolmistress does not lift her eyes from her plate, — "the little

hunchback, Andy. When that little fellow comes to church, it is he, and not I, who preaches the sermon. The spiritual light in that face is marvelous sometimes, — a light that we can't afford to hide under a bushel; so I 've put him in one of the transept seats "—

"Amen corner," Robin explains.

"— that all who come in may behold the light. I conduct the service and Andy preaches the sermon."

"I verily believe he does," I rejoin. "Ethel, my dear, you have the effect of wanting a cup of tea. No? then you will, Mr. Armstrong; two lumps, isn't it?"

"I am afraid it 's three," — contritely; "but no cream this time, — I 'll compromise upon cream."

The hostess counts the lumps as she drops them into the cup, then adds one more for largess. "That," she says, "is the outward and visible sign of a good stepmother." The rector pauses, cup in hand.

"I knew Ingleside possessed a poetic

soul," he says, "the instant I tasted the butter."

"You humbug! And do you mean to say you were not convinced of it by the prevalence of log-fires and the absence of a Baltimore heater?"

He laughs. "Yes, but the butter decided it."

"Now that 's very pretty of you, Mr. Armstrong; we 'll let you come again. Robin, give Mr. Armstrong a moonshine."

"Take two, sir; take ever so many; mamma calls them ghosts."

"Ghosts? well, they are open to that objection; a vain and fleeting show, these moonshines. Ghosts of what, Robin?"

"Ghosts of the biscuits, sir. Keziah makes 'em."

"Does she?" Miss Ethel asks; "then do you think Keziah has another poetic soul?"

"A poetic soul, decidedly," says the rector, making a crescent of the dainty bit in his hand, "and there comes another,"—looking up.

"Why, so it is; here 's Dr. Pestolido!" exclaims the hostess. "You delightful man! come right in. Miss Ethel has reserved the very best seat for you, — beside her lovely self."

"Thanks, 'faire ladye;' too much honor, but I 'm not coming in. You are all coming out instantly to bathe in a sea of glory. The rainbow has issued a postobit, and old Sol is getting out some entirely new effects in polychromatics, and" —

"Stop him!" cries the "faire ladye;" "I just dare him to come through the window on those stilts. Mr. Armstrong, you 're big; you lift him down to our plane. Don't hurt him; lift him gently."

"Stilts! Where are they?" demands Robin. "Old Pickaback has been making me a pair all summer; stilts are the greatest fun out."

The young girl's laugh is low and sweet. "Never mind about the stilts, Robin. Dr. Pestolido is telling us how fine the sunset is. He thinks we had better hurry out, if we want to see it."

"I move that we all go down to the bluff," Mr. Armstrong says, rising and looking very big in this low-ceiled room of ours. This man certainly has the courage of his inches. His shoulders are square, which lends a cubit to one's stature invariably; his head is set upon them grandly; and the grace of lifting it just a little when he speaks to you renders his height superb.

"Come, then," says the hostess, springing up, — "there goes my best cream pitcher! — hurry everybody; sunsets never stand on the order of their going."

The doctor's superlatives are but comparative. There, upon a "sea of glory," is an open volume, whose pages are jeweled with opals, rubies, and sapphires, and whose text is illumined in characters of emerald and hyacinth-topaz. Pages on which are written precious promises in letters of living gold; a volume bound and clasped by Heaven itself.

As we stand transfigured in the afterglow, we gaze at the mystery beneath us and be-

yond, straining our mortal eyes to read between the lines of color and radiance. And as we gaze and wonder, the shadows are deepening, the jewels are fading — waning from our yearning eyes, the volume is closing — closing — has closed; and the sea of glory is but a phantom of the night.

CHAPTER X.

EBENEZER.

Nip and Tuck were brought to Ingleside in a feed-bag slung over Nathan's shoulder. They began housekeeping in a firkin; at the present rate of compound interest, the hogshead has not yet been coopered that will hold either of them.

They are black; so very black that Nathan made the original remark that "charcoal would make a white mark on 'em."

"You mighty right, honey," Keziah spoke up. "Call 'em Soot an' Smut, why don't ye? Kinder fits 'em."

"Indeed and I won't, then," protested Robin. "My pigs are going to have pretty names. I might name one of 'em after you, though, mammy," with a wink at Mary.

The knots in the old woman's turban

leaped into life. "On'y lemme cotch you gib my title to airy black rascal."

"Stiddy there, old 'ooman," said Nathan; "the boy 's only gassin'." Then, behind his hand to Robin, "Better look out; she 'll rise on ye."

"See 'em scramble for the bits o' praties in the bonnyclabber," interposed Mary, with her ready Irish tact; "faix an' it 's nip an' tuck 'twixt 'em, the little dhivils."

"Nip and Tuck! Why, Mary, you 've named the pigs. Hip-hip-hur-ray!"

Robin insists that there is no more reason for pigs to be dirty than for that dandy, Fetch. So he turns the garden hose upon them (which they think as good a joke as the rain), while Buster brushes their coats till they shine, not forgetting to straighten out the wiggles in their tails.

Keziah treats the matter with a fine contempt. "Better quit yer foolin' wid dem shotes; it 's gin Scriptur' to wash 'em. Me an' brer 'Bimlech was 'sputin' 'bout dat wery p'int Sunday arternoon. Brer 'Bimlech

'lows dat de potteraxes[1] in de ole Test'ment was ordered to let 'em waller. Pigs or hawgs, it makes no diffunce; let 'em waller."

To which false doctrine Robin pays no heed. Nathan is directed to sweep out the pen and rake their bed as decently as Fetch's own. This done, the ferule is brought out and school begins.

Not only are they learned in the graces of polite life, but they are born wits, these pigs. When they lay their wicked heads together and twinkle both ears, something particular is going to happen. Next you know they have broken jail, like Goldbarr's geese, and come wriggling out, cheek by jowl, bent on mischief. The chickens hie themselves to the seclusion of the hayloft. Ebenezer makes an interrogation point of his black body at first glimpse of the enemy, and describes a circumflex accent over Keziah's circumference as she sits on a low cricket at the kitchen door.

[1] Patriarchs.

If Bang were here he would improve their manners. He has made it his business to teach them their place and to see they keep it. To-day the rogues know as well as we that the dog is laid up for repairs. He had a difference of opinion with Ebenezer after breakfast with regard to certain rights of property. The finishing clause in Ebenezer's argument was convincing. Ebenezer's plateful of delicate chicken-bones is still Ebenezer's; Bang's share of the spoils are a well-trimmed ear, and a pair of eyes that promise to be blind to the faults of his dearest foe for some little time to come.

The one being at Ingleside the cat is afraid of is Keziah. His attitude to her is one of chilled distrust, arising from an unpleasantness connected with a burlap bag of offensive memory. He may forgive her about dinner-time, when raw liver and skim-milk are being attractively displayed in patty-pans for mannerly black cats, but he cannot forget it; it is a personal matter with Ebenezer.

When we first arrived at Ingleside the cat was in possession. Lest a doubt should linger in any mind as to his rights, he had measured his length — it is a long length — across the railing of the piazza. In his attempt to preserve his balance and the formalities at once, he lost both, toppled over, and fell headlong.

I am not fond of cats, and this one looked uncanny enough as he glared at me and vanished down cellar.

Our landlord had not mentioned puss as an item in the lease, apparently regarding him as a part of the good-will and fixtures of the place. After two nights I mentioned it, — mentioned it to Ryle. I sent for him, and said gently but firmly that the cat must be dispossessed, — evicted, — transported, and that right early.

"Why, shorely, mum, shorely. I mistrusted ye orter be kind o' lonesome like, along o' jest that leetle shaver o' yourn, an' I mought better throw Eb'nezer in for down weight, so to say; but in course, mum —

Here you, Eb'nezer! Kitty! Kitty! Puss! Here, pussy! Pussy! Git out, ye black varmint, ye! Sc-scat! Swish!"

A black zigzag bolted through the open cellar doors, whirled over the lawn in an accentuated frenzy, — Bang being an important feature of the frenzy, — and disappeared in the gloaming.

That ghost being laid, we set the house in order, closed the blinds, bolted the doors, and composed ourselves to slumber.

In the second watch of the night came Ebenezer. He opened the siege with handsprings and somersaults in surpassing variety against the window screens, and when admonished with missiles, broke out in bawls and wauls, swearing freely.

"There, now! what did I tell you, mamma?" murmured a sleepy voice from the trundle-bed; "Ryle 's no good."

"Well, something must be done," I moaned, "for I just will not put up with it. The idea of a horrid old cat keeping a whole house awake night after night in this ridicu-

lous way, — the idea! Robin, that cat goes into the smoke-house to-morrow night, — locked in; do you hear, Robin, — are you awake, dear?" But the soft, regular breathing of that small person is my only answer; and the remainder of that night was left to Ebenezer's ordering.

The next two nights he *was* locked in, and into different dungeons. He has a fine sense of humor, — this cat. He waited composedly until lights were out and heads leveled; then he either burrowed under the foundations, or crawled through the keyhole.

Whenever Keziah has a special grievance, she spares her spleen till nightfall. When her tea-things are out of the way, the kitchen in print, dishtowels hung out to dry, Nip and Tuck fed, and not so much as a shred of her duties left loose to reproach her, she gives an extra twist to the knots of her turban, each knot standing for a grudge, and lets out the reefs in her sleeves and drapery that her full-blown temper may burst without

let or hindrance. These preparations being effected to her mind, she sails away to the smoke-house door, her invariable growlery, where she spits her spite out in company with bats and owls and other evil genii.

"Mis' M'riar can't fool me. She ain't gwine tetch dat ole moldoozer, an' dat 's my dyin' word. Mis' M'riar ain't got no gumption 'bout beastesses. Only *lemme* fotch him a cuff wunst, dad drat him!"

Her muttered soliloquy is but a challenge to the echoes.

"Ef Mis' M'riar 'spec's me to honey up dat black warmint 'long wid de res' o' dis cattle-show, it 's gwine in de wages, an' dat 's whar it 's gwine. Whar 's de wittles comin' from?"

"Faith an' it 's groomblin' agin ye are, Keziah," says Mary, who appears at this moment with a lame chicken in her kind hand; she is carrying it to the house for surgical treatment.

"Grumblin'! Who 's grumblin', Mary Muldoon? It 's talkin' sense I is. Whar 's

de wittles comin' from? — dat 's what I wants to know."

Mary stooped to gather a handful of chickweed at her feet. The light of her lantern shone full upon it. The little cripple pecked away at it in silent protest against any dearth or stint at Ingleside.

"Dar 's de billy-goat. Robin 's a driv'lin' idjit 'bout dat goat. 'What you got kivered up in dis 'ere tin pail?' sez he. 'Lay-overs for meddlers,' sez I, — jes so. 'Fork it over, den,' he sez, 'dat 'll do for Billy,' sez he, an' scoops it out an' scoots."

"Av coorse; an' why would n't he, the darlint?"

"It 's more 'n life 's wuth to kill a briler, dese days. Nathan takes an' kitches a couple o' pore, measly draggle-tails, — de skinny kind dat nuffin on de footstool ain't gwine to fatten, — an' I dry-picks 'em to make 'em go furder. Den I fries 'em or briles 'em, 'cordin' to de 'rection o' de wind in de chimbley. Den I stirs me up nuff corn cookies for a camp-meetin' shout, an' kivers

de bottom o' de dish wid 'em, an' on top o' de cookies I lays de two mossels o' mizry; an' de fambly 'spec's de bones fum de pickin's to feed a famine, an' de pigs besides."

The little cripple nestled close in Mary's sheltering hands, shutting its eyes contentedly.

The knots in the old woman's bandanna were never less imposing than at this moment. Beginning as important points in her argument, they were dwindling and being consumed by virtue of her vehemence.

"It 's 'Oh, mammy, an' oh, mammy, what yo' gone done wid all dose bones lef' fum de fried chicken? Dem 's for Bang you recomember.' All dose bones! Huh!

"An' now heah comes along dis ornery, low-down, slommikey, no 'count ash-cat. Oh, lawk-a-massy!"

With which harangue Keziah betook herself by a short cut to the pantry, while Mary, with the invalid hugged to her bosom, wended her way to the house. In another moment, from the sacred precincts of that

pantry issued sounds of violence most harrowing. Lids of wooden boxes came tumbling about the ears of earthern jars; jugs and bottles were having a tremendous falling out; lard tubs were getting their heads well punched, and as to the pots, kettles and pans! —

I could hear the racket from my old Dutch chair on the veranda. I knew it was that black embodiment of mischief, but said nothing.

When Keziah came for the order for breakfast a little later on, I still betrayed no knowledge of her state of mind.

Next day but one, Robin and I began a search in the hall closet for my old gray cloak and his pea-jacket. Yes, there they were, behind the mackintoshes. As we tugged away, down came the tennis rackets with a resounding crash, followed, quick as lightning, by a black body and two wild eyes. A moment more, and the thing was careering over the lawn.

My mind was made up. "Mary!" I

called out, "come down to me. I want some scraps of meat and a crash bag and some string, — a bit of clothes-line will do, — and hurry up!" Then I conferred with Robin, and Mary was taken into the conspiracy.

"Faix an' ye'll niver be afther dhrownin' him the day?" protests the loving Irish heart.

"Sh! mamma; mum 's the word. 'And this is the end of Solomon Grundy,'" sang the boy, as we went in search of the offender.

We found him huddled under the kitchen porch, peering through the low lattice and mewing dismally. We coaxed him out with a morsel of meat; allured him into the depths of a burlap bag, and with an uncompromising string tied it in as many knots as we expected to sail that morning. Then with all reefs out, and the cat for ballast, our boat slipped her painter and we headed for the Point.

The freshening breeze was with us. We

shimmered as lightly over the creek and down the bay as a sea-swallow on the wing, — Ebenezer protesting every inch of the way with his hind legs, — and in less than an hour we had rounded the Point and were threading our way through the long seaweed that heavily fringes its shore.

A stone's throw from the water's edge stands a baldheaded, barefaced tenement, without eyebrows or winkers or moral expression of any kind. Therein a parcel of Ryle's precious kinsfolk elect to abide; it was just the place for Ebenezer.

Hauling the bag ashore, the hempen cord was loosened. As we turned away, two little girls ran out of the house. One of them caught up the outcast in her arms with rapturous welcome; they were evidently old friends.

Bets were exchanged in our kitchen thereafter with regard to Ebenezer's reappearance upon his old stamping ground. "Bet you a shillin' he takes a through ticket on the fust streak o' lightnin' that 's booked for

these 'ere parts," prophesied Ryle. "I 'm willin' to bet my money on that little beast, Eb'nezer, ev'ry time."

"I lay he don't, then," retorted Nathan. He had brought Fetch's bit along, with a show of minding his own business, and was polishing it assiduously. "How fur d' ye make it to Goldbarr's P'int? I make it all o' four mile; an' it 's t'other side the crik, at that."

"'T ain't no odds to me if it 's four mile or forty. Me and Eb'nezer ain't bin pals an' shipmets nigh onto fifteen year, 'thout my gittin' his bearin's, so to say. Ef I was you, though, an' had my ch'ice 'twixt Eb'nezer an' the lightnin', I 'd ruther the lightnin' ev'ry time."

Keziah gave a sympathetic crow as she wrung her dishcloth dry. "Tain't no use projeckin' what dat cussed critter gwine do. I don't bodder my head wid dat sort o' trash, long as bilin' water holds out to sizzle an' flatirons is handy."

Ryle regarded her bandanna with uncom-

mon interest; that decoration is ever a conundrum to what he calls his mind.

"Guess I better be a-gittin' along," drawled the old fisherman. "Be it weak fish, or be it strip-ed bass for to-morrow, ladies?"

"'Clar' to goodness if I ain't done gone an' forgot to ax Mis' M'riar. You go, Mary; I 'm all a slop o' suds. Robin, honey," — to the boy as he dashed through the kitchen, — "do suthin for yo' pore ole mammy. Go ax yer maw what she wants in de way o' fish in de mawnin'."

"Oh, anything 's good enough — blue-fish, I reckon. I can't; I 'm in a norful hurry."

"Yo' ole mammy got suthin' cookin' for her sonny boy. It 's in de stove dis minnit," — sniffing, and rolling her tongue unctuously. "I done fed yer pigs dis mawnin'."

"Oh, bother!" groaned Robin.

"Dat 's you, honey, an' mind yo' ax her air it biscakes or air it muffles for tea.

"Lord love dat little feller's soul an'

body,"— as the boy darted away to do her bidding; "he sholy are de cream tart o' my 'sistence, — de cream tart an' de apple dumplin'."

. . . . . .

It was at dead of night. A dense fog covered the bay. In the fourth watch something was hurled at our window screens. I lowered myself at risk of life from an outpost of my fortress, felt my way about the low trundle-bed and its gentle sleeper, and slipped over to the window.

Yes, there it was — eyes, fangs, and tail! The next morning, Ebenezer's case was brought to the breakfast-table and laid before a committee of two. According to Robin, Ebenezer had come up to the scratch. He had been valorous, heroic, unflinching. He had imperiled life and limb for the welfare of his hearth and home. In a word, he was a poor, piteous, lonesome, homesick black pussy, honestly to the manor born; and we, without doubt were the grab-cats.

A woman's mind is not severely just,

more 's the pity. It is easier to theorize and philosophize and apostrophize at two o'clock of a dark and creepish night than to actively further the ends of justice!

After breakfast, Robin presented him to Keziah, with many soft speeches. "You darling old mammy, only look at the poor thing, — poor old kit! He 's most starved to death; eyes all bunged up; he 's had a norful fight with something or other" —

"Kinder tuckered out," admitted the old woman, softening.

"Ain't he, though? and you 're never going to ballyrag him, mammy. Gimme something or other for kitty right away; I don't believe he 's had a bite since he left here."

"Should n't wonder."

"Please, will you look at his ribs? Why, mammy, you can count every bone in his body — Hark! there 's Ryle's fish-horn, — we 're all right!" Next minute the boy is clinging to the tail of the wagon, and all but praying for scraps.

"Oh! it 's Eb'nezer; why, so 't is," said Ryle, with an engaging leer, weighing out the bluefish. "I 'll eat my head off ef 't ain't Eb'nezer, 'live an' kickin'."

"Yes, and he 's going to stay, poor kitty-cat! I want a snapper for him."

"So?" Ryle bows low, hat in hand. "Eb'nezer, my respec's. Hope I find ye mod'rately mizzable. Many happy returns!"

CHAPTER XI.

OLD CRONIES.

RYLE 's home! There is a convention at the Wigwam to-night.

Messrs. Larkin and Steppnfetcher, of coaching fame, are present. Being off duty, they are in fatigue dress of copious trousers, velveteen shooting jackets, florid waistcoats, shirts plentifully besprinkled with horse-shoes, whips, and jockey caps, exuberant neckgear, nondescript hats, and jewelry in profusion, — a dress so becoming as to deeply agitate the housemaids who gathered about the area windows of the Great House to see them pass.

Bellows, the blacksmith, is also present. He is very present indeed, in a new and surprising set of braces, the like of which was never seen upon his burly frame. They are

not only a constitutional amendment to his habitual attire, but a concession to necessity.

"That 's you, smithy," drawls Larkin; "git up on your pegs an' give us a squint at them gallusses; give them gallusses a show."

"Scrumptious, he! he!" whinnies one of the under-grooms.

"Yer own daddy would n't know yer, ef he was to fall over yer, Jim," says Teddy.

But Ryle views the constitutional amendment with favor.

"You done well, Bellows. That one gallus o' yourn warn't wuth a hang, noways. I tell ye, mates, when it comes to one gallus an' one bone button, an' leavin' the res' to Providence, ye know!" —

The speaker resumes his pipe with a judicial air. Jim smiles, and looks particularly foolish. Mange puts in a word.

"I see Judge Ingot to-day. He come a-ridin' by on that gray cob o' his'n; sets him like a statcher."

"Fine figger of a man," Taggert admits, remembering his own.

"Ain't a finer nor a likelier man nor Jedge Ingot 'twixt here an' Montauk," proclaims Ryle. "Me an' him was boys together, — raised right here in Craddock."

"Proud to know you, sir," says Teddy, with a flourish.

"Same to you, coachee; don't mention it, I beg. Yes, sir; me an' him went to ther same deestrick school when we was leetle chips; played hooky an' went fishin' for shiners in a leaky old dugout . . . an' got larrupped for it arterwards with the wery same rawhide!

"Her name was Anastasy," he continues after a meditative pause, — "Anastasy Maddix. She was a tearer, she was, — reg'lar old cat. Us boys useter call her Miss Nasty." Ryle grins a wide grin as he calls up these sentimental reflections. "Lord! but warn't she skinny!"

"Jedge Ingot was to my shop this forenoon," says the blackmith. "One o' them sorr'ls o' his'n had picked up a rusty nail an' druv it clar into the quick. Whiles' I

was a-drorin' of it out, the Jedge was a-chinnin' 'bout war times."

"Cavalry orf'cer, warn't he?" somebody asks.

"An' a comrade of yourn, Ryle," says Mr. Trigger.

"Not much he warn't. He was drafted, he was. I was a wolunteer," — proudly.

"He 's a master hand to palaver, Jedge Ingot is," continues the blacksmith; "I never see his beat when he gits a-goin'. Says his legs was 'crost the saddle on a stretch for two days, — thar 's fightin' for ye! Says him an' his hoss useter sleep jes' so, long tramps; wake up for a ditch or a gulley, an' drap off ag'in till mornin'. Says it 's easy as t' other way, when ye git into the hang of it."

"So 't is," Ryle remarks gravely; "I been thar."

"Howsomdever did a man o' your gifts and gumption git into the army, Mr. Ryerson?" queries the dog doctor, deferentially.

Ryle brings the weight of his brows to

bear upon the question; that period of his history is not to be approached lightly.

"Me? Dogged ef I know, — guess 't was Peter. Res'less, rovin', easy-goin' sort o' chap, Peter Ryerson. Crazy over boomaladdies from time he was knee high to nawthin'. Everlastin' more a-gittin' up sojer comp'nies an' drillin' 'em. Whittlin' out swords an' muskits an' sich."

"That 's him all over, — that 's Pete," Mange observes.

"Who 's a-tellin' this yarn?" snaps the old fisherman. Mange subsides and is mute.

"When the war broke out, nawthin' else would n't pacify him; go he must. Dad was agin it from the fust. Said a man's dooty, fust off, was to his forbears. Said the country could go to grass, for all him. Said he 'd give us a yawl, out an' out, an' go pardners in the fishin' bizness. Said we was a couple o' durn fools, an' idjits, an' suthin' else flatterin'.

"One arternoon in April o' that year, dad 'lowed he 'd go to camp-meetin': old man

was deacon in the church, ye see, an' turr'ble pious. Pete gimme a wink. 'Camp 's t' other side o' Sea View, ain't it?' says Pete. 'Thirteen mile thar an' thirteen back! Git him up some grub, will yer, Ryle; no good prayin' an' exhortin' on a empty stummik. Don't you forgit the bottle o' draps,' cuttin' his eye at me; 'I won't be a minute hitchin' up.' Pete could be almighty agreeable an' 'commodatin' when he was a mind.

"Dad was cornsid'able set up, but he never let on. Said it looked to wind'ard like a spell o' weather; said we better see to them trawls afore tide was out. Wal, sir, we h'isted him into the waggin (he was mortial fleshy), an' 'sorted him. Ole man had n't more 'n struck the turnpike afore we had picked up our duds, packed our kit, and was leggin' it, two-forty, for Middleport station."

A twist of Ryle's jaw discloses every evil fang within it; they stand for exclamation points to this part of his narrative.

"We 'listed for three year. I warn't never what ye mought call a common sojer or private, I warn't; I was in the quartermaster department," — this consequentially. Ryle smokes through his nose with the ease and dexterity of long practice. After a pause, during which he neither sneezes nor strangles, he says slowly, —

"Into the quartermaster department was whar they landed *me*, an' thar I stuck. Fust to last I bootchered twenty thousand head o' cattle, sir, — twenty thousand; an' I never bloodied a knife!"

There is an ominous hush in the assembly. Ryle breathes his soul into the corncob; surprising how small a space will hold the pith of some personalities! The smoke rises in rings and vaporous mysteries; Ryle's visage is impenetrable.

"Fust call for troops me an' Pete 'listed for three year. When our time was out bounties was runnin' pratty high. Daddy give it out as his 'pinions that cornsiderin' we had fetched home whole skins to our car-

kisses, an' cornsiderin' we warn't nairy one of us born nat'rels, we was a blame sight smarter to let the sojerin' go to the devil an' stick to the trawls.

"Pete, he was easy persuaded. Thar was a gal he was sweet on livin' t' other side the P'int. She 'd made out to wait for Pete all them year, — name was Polly Pearsall."

"Thort Mis' Ryerson's given name was Mehitabel," Nathan remarks in a puzzled tone. Nathan has sailed with Robin to the Point for clams, and feels intimate with that branch of the family.

"Mis' Pete Ryerson? Lord bless ye, man, he 's planted two on 'em sence Polly Pearsall. Mehitabel 's number four, she is." Ryle proclaims these facts through his pipe, which happy medium chuckles inwardly, sputters, and explodes in giggles.

"Pete, he 'lowed he 'd got 'nough sojerin' for one spell. He got spliced to Polly, bought the P'int on tick, an' tuk to clammin' " —

"Peter-ed out, so to say," drolls one wit. "Stuck in the mud," chirps another, who might be Mr. Steppnfetcher.

"As a profession, clam diggin' ain't much excitement into it," Ryle remarks evenly. "No more ain't hangin' on to the tail-eend of a tally-ho coach, an' tootin' a horn, I jedge."

Teddy leans lazily against the fence, arms akimbo; Larkin is equally unconcerned. If any shots have been fired, nobody is hurt.

"Would n't airy one o' them perfessions ha' filled your bill, Mr. Ryerson?" says the dog doctor, with a note of admiration.

"Lord, no! My spunk was up."

"An' so was the bounties," Teddy ventures slyly.

"An' so was the bounties, my buck, an' don't yer forgit it.

"One night a boat-load o' reg'lars come ashore right below here. They 'd been on a bat down the bay, was ketched in a fog, an' got aground. I 'd been out for bunkers, I recomember, and my skiff was loaded down

to her scuppers. I hauled up alongside. 'Ef it 's a skipper yer layin' for,' sez I, 'here 's yer sorts.' We skipped, we did."

"Skipped the bounty, you say"—

"We skipped, we did," Ryle continues calmly. "Thar was a recruitin' orf'cer aboard the sloop. I 'listed to the chune o' Yankee Doodle an' twelve hundred dollars, I did," —

"Rats!" "Oh, come off!" "Twelve hundred!" "Yer talkin' in yer hat."

"Ruther a tidy pile o' tin, warn't it, mate? I salted it right down in the Middleport Savin's Bank, — come in handy when that little piece o' property was throwed into the market." Ryle speaks with the careless ease common to all great financiers.

"Ryle's Ketch," says one of the company in an undertone to his neighbors. "All 's fish that comes to Ryle's net," sighs another. Nathan clears his throat.

"Ahem! Ahem! That fool Fitz-Jinkins was hanging about our place the most o' yestiddy. He 's took a all-fired shine to our

Robin. Robin's mar ain't took no shine to him, she ain't; it 's my b'lief she 'll h'ist him yit."

"Pertic'lar friend o' Mr. Steppnfetcher's," Larkin observes casually as he lights another cigar.

Teddy's dimpled chin goes up an inch, while he tacks on another cubit to his stature.

"Raythur so, slightually, a few." He thrusts his tongue into his cheek, whence comes a sound like drawing the cork of a bottle of wrath.

"Draw it mild, Teddy," wheezes a voice behind him; "draw it mild."

"'T was the Tuesday afore the Middleport races; me an' Skyrocket was on the road tryin' our wind an' limberin' up our j'ints 'gainst we wanted 'em. 'Long comes Fitzie with that yaller-bodied game cart o' his 'n an' the buckskin cobs. Here they come, all over road, like a locomotive with the jim-jams."

"That 's Fitz-Jinkins," says a pudding-

faced man just arrived, — a man with a nose like a sauceboat, a floating eye, and other lines of beauty.

"I pulled her up so suddent she nigh 'bout sot down, Skyrocket did. 'Shake 'em up, old gal,' sez I, — '*Shake* 'em! What 's the matter with ye?' I fetched her a tree-menjous dig in the ribs, an' I 'll be ding-swizzled ef that little filly did n't go for them corncobs — buckskins I would say — same as she was powder an' I was matches. Thunder an' lightnin' 's a burnt match to Skyrocket, — she 's that tetchy. Sich an-other snortin', an' cavortin' — whee-ugh!"

Mr. Steppnfetcher's whistle is one of his greater faculties. It is a figure of speech or a safety valve.

"Whee-ugh! Whole kit an' caboodle of 'em chucked kerchunk into the wery ditch picked out for a diffunt party? Smoke?"

As Mr. Steppnfetcher warms to his theme he affects one of the attitudes for which he is famous; Ryle views the result from the corner of one eye.

"Smashed to smithereens, by jingo. Game cart toted home in two wheelbarrer loads nex' day, — come in handy for kitchin kindlin's. As for the buckskins, they fetched up, I am giv' to understand by a eye-witness, jest a leetle this side o' Ballyhack."

The chuckles burst into shouts of laughter; even Larkin forgets to remember himself and is uproarious.

"What become o' Fitz-Jinkins?" pipes a shrill voice.

"Oh, Fitzie 's pheluginous. Got 'nough stuffin' knocked out in the scrimmage to git him into ruther decent shape for the nex' turnout his mar 'll buy for him."

Ryle darts a gleam from under his shaggy brows. "He 'll turn out, my boy, after this; turn out ev'ry time — ye kin take my affidavy."

"He turned out this forenoon in wimmin's clo'es," says a person in silhouette on the fence, — a person so rawboned and loose-limbed as to be singularly adapted to his

position on that top rail, — no half-full feed bag could be balanced better; a figure already introduced as "Pickaback;" a loafer of the first magnitude, a presiding elder in the Methodist Church, and a bone-and-rag collector by persuasion.

"He makes me tired," drones this worthy. "I seen him gallivantin' the gals at the post-office to-day, dressed up in the awfullest lot o' molly-coddle togs you ever see. A pink silk sash with tossles danglin' to one side; cribbed it from his sister, o' course, — the chump!"

"He 's took a great shine to our Robin," Nathan begins again. "He paddles 'cross the crik in that canvas canoe o' his'n, — it don't weigh more 'n a sneeze, — he lays to an' whistles, an' Robin 's off arter him like a streak o' greased lightnin', 't ain't no odds what else is in the wind. He totes him over to his shebang, an' then that sweet-scented s'rub begins to blow. Blows 'bout old Goldbarr's swag, — how many gold dishes, gold plates, gold teapots he 's got" —

"Oh, luff up, there!" "Put on the brakes!" "What ye givin' us?" "That 's a likely yarn!" comes like a roll of musketry from the outposts.

"That 's true as preachin'" (Ryle's similes are always good); "I seen 'em myself through the pantry winder t' other day; head butler was cleanin' of 'em for a big fandango to come off next evenin'. I hove to an' give him good-day. I had a mess o' sof' crabs in a passel o' seaweed, — they was a pictur' to look at. I onkivered 'em, jes' to see his mouth water. He hefted the biggest of 'em, — none of 'em warn't much bigger nor spiders, they was that delicate, — then layin' it back easy, and lickin' his fingers, he sez to me, sez he, 'Cornsiderin' the market 's overstocked, what mought sich little fiddlers as them there bring apiece to-day?'

"'Them little fiddlers ain't for sale, sir,' sez I; 'I brung 'em along as a present for a friend o' mine. I picked 'em out of a bar'l full that 's booked for Dorlon's in the Ful-

ton Market. If you 'll excuge the liberty,' I says, 'I brung 'em to you, sir,' sez I; 'I thort you and your lady might like 'em for a change to your suppers,' sez I.

"Warn't nawthin' more said 'bout 'fiddlers,'" — grimly; "they was sof' crabs, they was; an' they weighed a pound apiece!

"Next I knowed I was t' other side the pantry winder, and me and the head butler thicker 'n thieves. Every smitch o' their table silver is gold, — solid gold, no monkeyin': gravies, wege'bles, forks, an' spoons, — which is a switch-off, as the tender says to the locomotive; excuge delays. Go ahead, Nathan."

"I was about to remark, sir," says Mr. Nathan Taggart, stiffly, "with ref'rence to that sweet-scented s'rub by the name o' Fitz-Jinkins," — the expression is so telling that he rolls it out as often as good piecrust, — "I was goin' to say when somebody chipped in, that when Fitz-Jinkins begins to blow, Robin never lets on but what *he* 's sadisfied. The little cuss has got a fiddle

he cut out'n a cornstalk. Minute that precious Navigator shakes out his reefs, an' sails into Goldbarr's kitchen with a cargo o' solid silver, Robin fetches out his fiddle an' takes to scrapin' chunes. Scrapes 'em kinder promisc'ous, like. Chaws his tongue into one cheek, — it 's good as a show, — chaws it into one cheek, *so!* when the durn thing gits a hitch into it an' won't go. Robin 's dretful tickled when he scrapes out 'Hark from the tombs,' or 'Razzle Dazzle,' or suthin' else lively."

Nathan Taggart wipes his face upon his sleeve, flings imaginary drops into the stilly night, settles his head on both arms, and abandons himself to the downy ease of the woodpile. As he measures his length there, Ryle sits erect.

"Speakin' o' wittles reminds me o' drinks," says this moral philosopher. "The time a pore man feels ez good ez a rich man is the time he 's drunk. That 's the reason this coon lets hisself go, once in a moon's age. Odd, dull times in winter, when fish don't

bite, nor customers nuther, I toddles up to Craddock" (the Mecca of these fisherfolk), "an' I kin git ez jolly drunk on a quarter ez old Goldbarr hisself on a pocketful, — trust yer gran'dad for that, my hearties!" wagging his head and cracking with laughter.

"Speakin' o' wittles, them Goldbarrs' fish bill ain't nawthin' to be sneezed at, I jedge," observes the dog doctor.

Ryle is silent for the length of a smoker's yawn. Pressing the burning tobacco into place with his thumb, — live coals are not the only sentient things that have to come under that thumb! — pressing it deftly, he smites his pocket.

"'T ain't nawthin' to brag on, Mange, but it helps to keep the pot a-bilin'. I gits my check for a hundred dollars for what I fetches 'em, an' I gits it ev'ry week. Bluefish an' strip-ed bass for the help, Spanish mack'rel an' sheepshead for the fambly. A hundred a week, sir!" this defiantly, and as the yarn waxes, no dog dares bark.

"Fambly don't resk no fish, be it shells or be it fins, but Ryle Ryerson's. Mis' Goldbarr comes out to the kitchin door, friendly as yer please, — she ain't none o' yer proud stummiks, — an' sez she, 'Mr. Ryerson, I ain't never no appetite to mention,' sez she, 'but I kin allers pick a bit o' fish to my supper o' your choosin'!'"

Ryle knocks the ashes from his corncob for the last time to-night, wrings the neck of the pouch, ties it in a hard noose with a bit of fishline, and returns both to their ledge within the woodpile. A mortal wrench of every bone in his body, an abysmal yawn, and the council is ended.

Larkin opens his mouth to protest, but is checked by a gesture.

"Tide 's high at four-fifteen, young man; guess I 'll turn in, if it 's to be forty winks afore daylight, but I wanter mention a fact right here, an' don't none o' you never forgit it: —

"If Archibald Goldbarr's money was all changed into one-dollar bills, if they was

ironed out slick and tidy, an' you was to paste 'em eend on eend fur 's they 'd go, I tell you, boys, they 'd make a belly-band that 'd reach smack round the world. Yes, sir-ee!"

CHAPTER XII.

BUSTER.

A WHISTLE can be heard coming over the bridge that spans our little creek. I know that whistle; it belongs to a branch — a twig, rather — of the Bloomsbury tree, popularly known as "Buster."

The whistle is a complicated affair, and at this moment seems to be involved with a wicker-basket of plethoric habit. Buster is endeavoring to take both over a five-barred fence at the same time, has been arrested by a jag or tag in the top rail, and is having a time of it.

I know that basket well. A vision presents itself to me of early vegetables, new-laid eggs, saltless butter, and a cream-cheese or two, — all carefully put up for the Mistress of Ingleside, with the "respectful com-

pliments" of Mr. Goldbarr's head gardener, — the Goldbarrs being at Saratoga.

"Pity they did n't arrive in time for dinner," think I. "Nice boy, that Buster Bloomsbury, — a nice, mannerly boy. Robin's old pea-jacket will about fit him; then that ulster" —

But no; neither the bucolic delicacies, nor the "respectful compliments" (another delicacy), nor the accompanying whistle, are bound for Ingleside; they all turn off toward the Seaside Home.

"Good man, that Bloomsbury," I reflect, my mental vane veering suddenly; "he 's got a heart in his body. Why did n't I think to carry some ice-cream to Maggy's sister? lots of it left over. What a stupid I am! I 'll do it this very minute."

"And, Mary, break me off a good big piece of the fresh sponge-cake, — little Andy is particularly fond of sponge-cake; for your life don't cut it."

"Beloike a moosharoon sangwich 'll timpt him — cut thin, d' ye moind. I 'll do a coople av 'em in a whipstitch!"

"Where you going, mamma?" Robin would like to know. "What 's all this that smells in the basket?" sniffs Bang's inquisitive nose.

"Keep your nose out of that basket, sir, and take it properly by the handle. Come! Fetch it along, Bang, — fetch it! . . . It 's going to little Maggy, Robin; you come too. May be we can coax her out for a little drive this afternoon; she does not seem to pick up strength like the others."

Robin gets his hat and I my sunshade. Bang stalks solemnly beside us, the basket in his mouth, and with a pervading sense of his own importance, — a sense which is quickened by the approach of Larkin's bulldog, with epithets on his tongue and blood in his eye. Bang takes no further notice of these signals than the bristles along his spinal column may be supposed to express, unless we except a latent gleam in his own eye to the effect that he will see the Larkin dog later on.

As we turn to come through the outer

gate of the Home, there drives up to it a bumptious baker of tender years and tough conceit; he has brought the daily dole of buns. Perceiving a group of the poor girls, in their shabby clothes, gathering golden-rod and September daisies by the way, he bethinks him to be funny.

"Old clo'! cash for clo'! Bottles, bones, soap-fat. Ting-a-ling! Rags to sell? Any r-r-rags?"

The girls look up in a dazed way, all their innocent happiness shuddering out of their faces; the wild flowers lie in a poor little heap at their feet.

"Take that, young man! — and that, and *that*, — here, boys, lend a hand!" and a shower of stale moss-bunkers comes about the ears of the jeering youth. Robin and Buster take aim at close range, while Ryle from the front seat of his fish wagon cheers them on, his wicked old face one wide, sardonic grin.

"Got a few more left o' the same sort, young punkin-head; where 'll ye have 'em?

Hip — hip, — look out there!" It is a jelly-fish this time, a big one, and it takes the boy obliquely.

The scoffer collapses like a penny bladder. It is a meek and mild baker's boy who now conveys those dreadful buns up the path, and through the shouts of that ecstatic crowd; the lashing of his bony beast, as he rattles round the corner, but faintly indicating the tenor of his mind. In times of war, like this, Buster can be a strong ally; he is terrible in action!

When the battle is over, when both baskets of goodies have been despoiled, when Ryle has delivered his supplies at the back door of the Home, we go our several ways in peace. The boys catch on behind Ryle's wagon and steal a ride back to Ingleside.

"Oceans of time to go crabbing, Buster," says Robin. "You don't have to go after those old cows till five o'clock; it 's only a little after three now; I heard it strike at the Home."

"I wish 't I could" —

"There 's dandy crabbing 'cross the creek," Robin continues adroitly; "Jim Fitz-Jenkins and I got a norful lot of 'em this morning. We gave 'em to Ryle."

"That so? Pop ast me to weed the pussley bed; but I s'pose I *could* weed it 'long towards evenin'."

"Course you can: come on, Buster; Keziah 's got plenty of soup meat; we 'll beg her for some for bait."

"Ain't a mossel, honey," says the old woman kindly; "yo' ole mammy 's mons'ous sorry to dis'p'int her sonny boy; but Bang 's 'spons'ble for dat mess o' soup meat, dog-gone him."

"What happened to it?" cries Robin in dismay; "why, it was right here on the kitchen porch, before dinner. What you let him have it for, mammy?"

"Did n't let; he tuk it."

The dog lifts his head, and with both ears well forward gives keen attention.

"'T was jes' befo' dinner time; I was busy dishin' up dinner. Bang was strotched

out on de po'ch a-sunnin' hisself arter his breakwhish, an' dat chock wid mush an' milk he was fit ter split. Heah comes dat teensy, tinesy, mischeevious banty rooster a-struttin' 'long big as Cuffee. In a li'l minute he spies de soup meat" —

"Oh, bother!"

— "an' makes a grab. 'No yer don't, honey,' sez Bang, an' fotches him a cuff. Den dar wus a tussle, yo' better b'lieve. He pitch into Bang an' claw him good; an' he ain't bigger 'n a sneeze, dat little rooster!"

"And what did Bang do? Did you let that banty lick you, you rascal?" demanded the young master, taking the setter's head between his hands, and searching his darkling eyes for his conscience. The dog did not flinch, but he disdained to answer; character must go for something.

"I was brownin' my gravy for de fried chicken, an' I darsn't budge a inch fum dat spider. Bimeby I see Bang scootin' for de laylock bush, tail a-boom, wid suthin' sus-

picuous in his mouf. Nex' news he scratch a hole an' kiver it up keerful wid his paws. Den I knowed for sartain sho' nobody need n't pester 'bout Bang's supper, 'case he done bin an' gone to market, — whah ! whah ! whah ! "

Bang looks from one to the other, puts out a paw to his master, blinks both eyes, and looks so penitent that Robin is constrained to forgive him on the spot.

" Oh, well ! " sighs the young philosopher, " it 's too roasting hot to go crabbing anyway ; let 's take Bang to the creek and give him a swim."

" An' rub him down after it," says Buster.

Our well-bred setter delights in a downright plunge in the river, and another one to make sure ; then in the thorough toweling the lush clover gives him. But not until Robin has taken the soft silken locks in his loving hands, and brushed and polished them on both sides, — not until then is he the perfect beauty that we know.

" There 's unc' Laz'rus," exclaim the boys in a breath. " How-do, uncle ? "

"I 'm a-creepin', I 'm 'bleeged to ye; how 's marse Robin?" touching his hat.

"Fine! What 's become of that story you promised to tell us?"

"I 'clar forgits whut story dat story wus; wus it de one 'bout ole Nick an' de hopper-grasses?"

"Yes, yes! — guess so; tell us that one, anyhow."

"Jes' so. I 'spicioned it mought be tur'r one 'bout de ghos' in de buryin' ground, back o' de meetin'-'ouse. I seen dat ghos' time an' agin my own se'f. Dat ghos' got a gredge 'gin ole Laz'rus Driggus," — in an awesome voice.

"Ghost!" scornfully; "who 's afraid o' ghosts! Give us that one first, though."

All three are by this time down on the shady side of a sandbank, the setter having taken to the water. The old man bares his head to what little breeze may come ashore; the boys, with their hair on end in anticipation, are trying to keep cool and look composed.

If poets are born, so are story-tellers, and chiefest among these are the negroes. Everything about them contributes to this. Their faith in signs and wonders ; their delight in the marvelous; their superstitions, their fervid imagination, and the vein of poetry that tinges all they say.

The stories over, the party of three come strolling back at an idle pace to the kitchen porch ; Keziah is still at work. After a sidelong look at the two flushed faces, Keziah "would n't wonder if there war n't some scrapin's lef' in de ice-cream freezer." This to herself, as she goes in search of two kitchen saucers. In another minute she has slipped out of the back door with something tucked artfully under her big apron. Robin darts after her, followed closely by Buster.

"Here! Who you doggin'! Clar' out my tracks, — you hear me?"

"Boys! boys! come away," says a voice from the veranda, "Keziah 's busy."

But so are the boys. They all reach the smoke-house together.

"Now, Robin, you hears my las' dyin' word. Ef you lays a finger on dat freezer, I 'm gwine to gib de las' scrapin's to Buster."

Which threat acts vicariously.

The boys watch her motions narrowly, till the saucers are as full as they can hold.

"Now, honey, don't go drap a drap on dem britches, or Miss M'riar gwine dead me, sho! Heah! climb up on de fence, bofe of ye, an' I 'll spread out my apurn to kitch de draps."

The boys scramble into place, while the old woman seats herself upon a stump near by.

"Have some, mammy. Num-num! but ain't it good!"

"Have some o' mine, ma'am," says Buster, offering a big spoonful.

"No, honey; eat it all up y'sef; de leas' mossel o' dat stuff boun' to sot my in'ards in a rack o' miz'ry. Tell yo' what do, Robin, for yo' pore ole mammy! Sing a li'l chune for me; 'Jim, crack corn,' gwine chirk me up powerful."

The boys balance themselves on the fence

rail and see-saw happily between the mouthfuls. At this juncture one of the forty thieves of the village, who has been hidden in the grass watching, creeps up stealthily behind and bursts suddenly upon them.

"Hi! hi! you old Buster Bloomsb'ry. I see you settin' up yer back wid yer betters. Geeminy crackey! but ain't we fine in our Sunday lugs o' week days! Oh, no! not at all;" and other such gibes and jeers, which the young Brummel may well afford to suffer, with that slow stream of luscious fluid trickling coldly down his thirsty throat. He swallows blissfully and shuts his eyes. His persecutor views the scene with gnawing greed and envy.

"Hi! hi! but ain't we splinkum! Scoot home an' peel off them fancy britches, old dandy Buster! Scoot afore yer daddy kitches yer an' gives yer a lambastin'. I kin lick *you*, smarty!" making a grab for the saucer.

Keziah is too quick for him. She brings him a resounding whack with her open palm, which sends the small detachment fly-

ing through the air like a trap-ball. The boys break all up into spasms of glee. Robin is so delighted he fairly hugs the old woman and pats her black face.

"Good for you, mammy! Good lick!" Keziah returns the caress heartily, but is really absorbed in the antics of the small detachment, who has picked himself up, and is hopping away on one foot, howling. She folds the arm of justice under her idle elbow, and hugs herself comfortably.

"Honey, some crawlin' critters can be stomped on easy an' mashed, when dey gits in de way o' de righteous. But dis kind dat Satan keeps a-buzzin' to pester de saints to sin, — de warmints wid pizen in de sting"—

"I smell something burnin'," Buster remarks, as he prepares to lick his saucer; "smells like — smells like"— sniffing curiously. Keziah starts up, runs for the kitchen, and flings wide open the oven door.

"Burnt to a cinder!" she wails; "burnt up to a cinder! Dem cinnamon jumbles gwine to lose me my 'ligion yit!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A FRIEND OF THE RECTOR'S.

"WON'T you look after my friend Tricoupis while I am away on my vacation? He is to take my place, you know." It is Mr. Armstrong who speaks, standing in our doorway, his back to the light.

"With the greatest possible pleasure," I begin.

"In the pulpit, I mean. He has the gift of all tongues but ours. I have told him to come to you with his sermons, and you will straighten them out for him."

I looked at the young person our rector was giving me so freely.

Of medium height, with the student stoop in his shoulders. A boyish face certainly, with an uncertain chin, a nervous mouth, prominent eyes, and still more prominent spectacles, the long wire ends wound around

his ears. Scant wisps of hair strayed about his head with the effect of having lost their way. No amount of brushing could keep any of them at the true scholarly slant.

"Sermons — to me? You 're not in earnest, Mr. Armstrong."

"Of course I am in earnest; why not?"

I laughed and shook my head.

"To *me?* Please don't be funny this time."

"Upon my word, I was never so serious before. You 'll never harden your heart against him, — you 'll help him out; I know you will."

"I 'm afraid you 're wandering in your mind, Mr. Armstrong. Why, I could n't write out a notice for a Sunday-school picnic without help from the superintendent; and a sermon!"

I was seated in the least conciliatory chair in the room, — a high-backed, stiffnecked, inflexible affair. The young Oriental listened attentively, then bounded rather than walked across the room.

"Superintend! C'est ça — superintend!" he cried out; "you will superintend — you will teach me the treecks of your idiom, madame; is it not so?"

He seized my hand, saluted the back of it (no foreign fashion has as yet been invented which causes the modest American more anguish!), and then recovered himself with aplomb; indeed, a plumb line seemed to fall to his heels as they came together with a click, he was so preternaturally perpendicular. I smiled at the sanguine face that was scanning mine, — a good face truly, and one to befriend; albeit a trifle too explosive for a quiet life like mine.

I smiled sweetly at him, but breathed to myself in ghostly confidence, "What! direct this fervid youth's effusions? I think not."

"I knew you would consent," returned Mr. Armstrong, easily; "how good you are! You see it 's the idiom," — dropping into a confidential tone. "When the idiom ties the text into hard knots, you can pick them

all out for him so readily." The speaker was beginning to feel comfortable in his mind; this shifting the responsibility of another's errors is apt to solace the soul.

"The idiom! Ma foi, but your idiom," lamented the younger man, "it floors one."

I laughed. "Does it? Then who taught you that one?"

He hunched up one shoulder in his foreign way, waved his head from side to side, and gazed out of the window. A bit of drama was going on outside.

Keziah was crossing the lawn, a basket of wet clothes poised upon her turbaned head, her big apron gathered up in both hands to hold the clothespins. Moving over the grass with the ease of long habit, — she would scorn to lift an arm to brace that mighty load, — she swung her burden to the ground, and, lifting up her voice, sang, —

"Sisters, holp me in dis fight;
Satin 's tryin' wid all his might
To drag me down de golden stair,
An' git my soul to rip and tear.

"Sisters, cotch me by de han',
Help me pas' de dang'rous rocks;
Satin 's sot his eyes on me
To trip me up wid stumblin' blocks."

There is a touch of pathos in the untrained voice of a negro, however grotesque the words, that renders it in a way akin to all the other voices of nature.

My resolve wavered in rhythm with her motions, and yet what a slight thing will turn the whole drift of one's purpose!

"Just listen to that dear old Keziah of mine," I said, half aloud; "I believe she has brought me a message."

"And you promise to look after him?" The rector carried but one thought at a time.

"Look after him, Mr. Armstrong? why, I shall adopt him." The song had found its home.

"Of course you will," he exclaimed, springing up and pacing the room. "What did I tell you, old fellow?" shaking his friend by the shoulder; "she 's going to adopt you! You 're provided for."

"And you," I asked, when both were quiet again, — "you are off in the morning, Mr. Armstrong?"

"By the first train."

"Perfect time of the year for the mountains," I said, with the effect of a new thought. "Shall you be away all September?"

"That depends; that is, I am not sure," — guardedly.

"How pleasant for you that Miss Ethel should be there at this time! Her aunt has a place near the Mountain House, I believe."

"Her sister," he said, coloring a little.

"Oh! her sister, is it? I thought it was her aunt." Nobody spoke for a breath or two, and then I went on quietly: "I heard to-day that Miss Ethel is not coming back to Craddock; do you know anything about it? I 'm awfully fond of that little girl."

The man hesitated, flushing all over his handsome face. "Not to the school, I believe," he answered.

"Oh! Then she *is* coming back. With you?" I asked, at a venture.

"I hope so," — unsteadily; "I trust so" — and I read the rest in his honest eyes.

"No!" I cried, and held out both hands. "No! — you don't mean it? Ah! how glad I am, — how very, very glad!"

"I thought — I thought — you would be," he stammered. "Her last word when we parted was this message to you." As if he had told me anything!

"Dear child, — dear Ethel! how sweet and good of her! Do you know, Mr. Armstrong, this thing has been the dear wish of my heart all summer. Oh, how happy you are! How happy you are going to be!"

"Yes," he said slowly, controlling his voice. "Yes, I believe — I shall be. I want to thank you for your words — your good words, my friend; you have always been my friend" —

"And Ethel's. You may tell her so, if you please. And tell her that my special

message to her is — no, I 'll write it — I 'll write her a love-letter."

"Do, — pray do; nothing will delight her half so much; but you will see us again."

"No, I think not. Robin's school opens the twenty-eighth. Cruel, is n't it, to lose a single day of this September weather?"

I spoke airily and looked the other way, to give him time to get his face in order.

"And don't give your work here another thought. Mr. Tricoupis and I are going to have some interesting evenings together, are n't we?" turning to my new friend. "Mr. Tricoupis is coming to tea every Friday night. I 've adopted him, you know!"

. . . . . .

Keziah dotes on preachers. She has that comfortable old orthodox belief in their constitutional and ineradicable holiness, whatsoever their sect or persuasion. She is also of opinion that their growth in grace is mightily helped along by a plentiful allowance of good things; so these "preacher's tea-par-

ties," as she calls them, are composed with "prayer and meditation;" she gives her pious soul to them.

"Get some soft crabs of Ryle, if you happen to see him, Keziah," I suggest; "and you can have a Russian salad as well as not, — there are enough peas and beans left over from dinner for a nice little dish."

"Go 'way fum me, Mis' M'riar; you sholy ain't gwine to 'stonish dat new preacher's stummik wid no sich a mess."

"And put two eggs in the mayonnaise," I say firmly, "and leave the salad on the ice till the very last minute."

"Ain't a drap o' sweet ile on de land!" this with grim satisfaction.

"Nathan is to bring a bottle from the village," I say, shutting the kitchen door. By which stratagem I get the last word; I wish I were as sure of my salad!

"Cold wittles fur de Lawd's 'n'inted," I hear her mutter through the closed door, "an' punish dat blessed preacher's insides wid sof' crabs! No, no, honey; yer don't

cotch Keziah wid no sich fool-contraptions. No meats fur repentance cooked in dis 'ere kitchen, praise de Lawd."

Keziah 's reflections are edifying but not soothing, for I am expecting Mr. Tricoupis to tea, and feel anxious about my supper. I go outside to look at the thunder-heads that are rearing and careering in the highway of the heavens. Unless something else happens, we shall have weather before sundown; I can smell it coming.

Keziah calls out to Nathan, who has just driven up with letters and parcels, to "git them tomaytuses an' pusley terectly, fur it 'll bust out a-rainin' afore ye know yerself."

"Time 'nough," drawls the man; "them 's on'y wind clouds," — shutting one eye and turning the other to leeward of the storm. Nathan is radically opposed to doing anything "terectly."

"Don't take Fetch out of harness," I say. "I 'll drive over myself for Mr. Tricoupis, and save him a wetting. Run, Robin, and

bring mamma her mackintosh ; it 's hanging in the linen closet. No, it is n't either ; you 'll find it on a peg behind the clock, or may be I left it in my — I declare I don't know where I left it, — ask Mary. And my old umbrella, — that 's a darling."

What a race it is with the rain! Fetch will never know why I whipped him so, poor fellow!

The rectory is but a short mile from Ingleside. I find my new friend, his brows a fretwork of wrinkles, shut in his study, all unconscious of the gathering storm ; the table littered with text-books and lexicons. I hail him through the open window.

"I 've come for you, Mr. Tricoupis. Look at that sky! Not a second to lose, — hurry! there 's the first drop."

He slips his precious sermon into its black satin cover and jumps into the wagon bareheaded.

"Had n't you better take your hat?" I hint politely.

"Here it is, dear ; I 'll throw it down,"

cooes a voice above us; and a girlish face and figure appear at an upper window. "Here goes — catch!" and a silvery laugh comes floating down with the shapeless thing. A second glance reveals a baby!

"Up-a-daisy! Shake a day-day to papa, my b'essed! See!" dancing it in her arms, "See! she 's kissing her hand to you, Paul; and she was her own papa's b'essed bootiful baby, so she was!"

"Your baby?" I ask; "yours?" and say no more. The child-mother at the window, and this beardless youth beside me! I am struck with what Barnes Newcome calls "respectful astonishment."

"I shall call upon Mrs. Tricoupis to-morrow," I remark when I recover breath. "Will you kindly put up the umbrella?"

Keziah has been as bad as her word. No soft crabs for tea, and — oh, my prophetic soul! — no Russian salad. Of what avail that I am boiling internally, if I do not boil over and hurt somebody, — a thing that I am morally certain not to do; I have such

a ridiculous way of simmering down after I have taken my place at this tea-table.

No Russian salad is upon it to magnify its charms; but even without that indigestible, our little banquet could be a Russian feast, and not dishonor that nation! Keziah 's "biscakes" are not to be beaten — by any one but Keziah; her "blue-monge" is an epic poem, a delicious harmony; and as to her bobinet cookies, they keep up a running accompaniment to all the rest.

Our supper ended, a lightwood knot or two and a handful of cones wake up to the conviviality of the hour, and proceed to crack old jokes among themselves and exchange the compliments of the season. The rain has not slackened; the night is turning chill. Our student lamp that elects to shine upon the writing-table brightens up and was never in better humor; we draw up close to it and fall to work.

To work! Oh, the moral of it, — the satire, the irony! That a paltry creature, whose happiest inspiration has been known

to come through the medium of a calico frock and lavender ribbons, should be permitted to handle things ecclesiastic and supernal!

Keziah looks in upon us, her arms full of lightwood. Her drowsing conscience is wakening.

"On'y look at dat sassy little fire," she whispers, "a-laffin' fit to kill itself! Yer sarvant, sir," — dropping to the young preacher as low a courtesy as her circumference will allow.

"We don't wish any more wood, Keziah," I say chillingly; "we have a great plenty." It will take more than lightwood knots of a September evening to atone to me for her crimes. "Let 's turn that sentence the other way, Mr. Tricoupis; how will this do?"

"I 've turned it and turned it until I am dizzy already," mourns the poor fellow. "Cut it out, madame; 'When in doubt, cut it out,' saith the sage."

"Cut it out indeed! Not a bit of it, we 'll turn it around; listen to this, now."

Keziah considers herself dismissed and departs in high dudgeon. I devote my few wits to the doomed knots in the sermon; tugging away at them until they are all picked out and in beautiful order. By ten o'clock the formidable sermon is back in its cover ready for Sunday, and its author is pouring out his grateful soul in three live languages and one dead one, while I protest in a ragged sort of way. Such extravagances are embarrassing to one of my simple education.

We open the upper half of the Dutch door and peer out. "Stupendous!" I say, for lack of a stronger word. "It rains, it do, and it rains wet; and the wind, it blows. Good gracious!"

The young man gives me a puzzled look, hesitates, laughs abruptly, and says something to himself, in perhaps — Arabic.

"Dark as pitch," I run on, — "yea, darker. And that lonesome little wife in a panic, and the brand new baby! Wait a second, I 'll call Nathan." But that mortal is not easily found.

I open the kitchen door to look for him. The room is in what Robin calls "spandy order." The bracket lamp burns cheerily; the red table-cover is out in all its bravery; Keziah has a lighted candle on her lap for the greater convenience of burning off ends when she threads her needle; both women are bending over it darning stockings.

"Where 's Nathan?" I ask.

"Nathan? Why, Ryle 's home," her sable highness answers, "so, in co'se, I ain't sor a hoof or horn o' Nathan since he eat his supper."

"Indeed! Well, light the lantern, Mary, and please be quick about it; Mr. Tricoupis is just going."

"Lantern 's away in the barn," murmurs Mary, rising and laying down her work.

"An' dat 's jest whar 't ain't," retorts the other; "Fitz-Jinkins's coachman borryed it a-yistiddy."

"And the oilskins too, no doubt," I add, with rising irritation.

"Nathan tuk an' brung his ileskins 'long

wid him to Ryle's, he did; an' he fotched de big brumberill too, — I sor him."

"Bless Nathan!" I say fervently, but my thoughts are intent upon the risks for the clerical cloth that is fluttering about the Dutch door, — the clerical cloth that must be the wearer's all.

"We 're all right," I say, running back to my visitor with my old gray cloak — that old campaigner — and proceeding to envelop him in its ample folds. "Fits you to a — Stop! I 'll button you in, far as they go, and skewer the rest of you with safety-pins, — get me some big ones, Mary." It is a woman's affair, beyond peradventure, with its pointed hood, silk linings, cords and tassels, and flirting fringes.

"There!" — with a gush of satisfaction, — "you 'll do; now away with melancholy!" And so, with the reverend trousers rolled up high, and my effeminate umbrella in both hands, the back door is held open by main force till our guest has banged himself out. I tarry for a moment to make

sure he is heading for home, then, with a sigh of relief, open the scrap of a piano, and with one of my Schumann delights before me, am quickly absorbed in its subtle harmonies. As my nerves recover tone, I turn the leaves and come upon a difficult scherzo; the very thing! I pound away at it for an hour or more, and have nearly conquered it, when . . . "Mercy! what on the face of the earth?" . . .

The back door springs open, and a miscellany of bedraggled fringes, linsey-woolsey, eccentric cords and tassels, and number eleven Oxford ties comes plunging into my sanctum, — dives in as from off a spring-board. The miscellany is as wet as if it had been down to the bottom of the sea. It has a voice withal which, if the voice be truly the organ of the soul, knows now no stops. The miscellany is shaking and groaning: hat gone, umbrella gone, — my English umbrella, if you please, — his spectacles gone, without which he was bat-blind.

He is sputtering in a polyglot of good

French, what may be Arabic, and broken English, with frenzied adjurations to the servants, who crowd the door, to "Good Lord, deliver us!"

"Au secours!" he cries, "save me! I 'm a lost man! Mâshallah! . . . I 've been in the river, — au fond! Gare, gare! Think you I am wet? Wussukh?"

"I do indeed, Mr. Tricoupis; I think you are very wet" —

"It is in the cornfield that I wander, — fehemt? . . . O fools and blind — insensées — aveugles! Is it the merciful Lord leads me? No, it is the devil — le diable — Istaghfirallah!"

He is floundering about the room as if it were the slough of despond; I did n't know one old gray cloak could hold so much water.

"Let me help you," I say with careful gravity; "these pins are apt to be tricky;" but he waves me away.

"It is that I am dragged into the river . . . my glasses are gone — perdu! Mes

lunettes! . . . Que faire?" wheeling round and glaring at me with the unseeing eyes of a shortsighted person.

"I could not get out — waheyât en-nebi! . . . The water came creep-ing, crawl-ing, guggle-uggling," — his teeth rattling like dice in a box; "up it comes — O mers et flots! . . . Down, down I go — Wallâh! into the pit — le puit épouvantable, . . . and the clay that is, what you call? — fangeux — wussukh! . . . Down I go, with this fearsome thing throttling me. . . . Bah!" tugging wildly at the buttons, whose integrity is affirmed by number six shoe-thread; I knew all about it, for I sewed them on myself.

Suddenly he stops and faces me.

"Holá! Ukaf! a light I see, un feu follet, . . . but afar off! bien loin! . . . Is that the light of home, cette lumière! — think you I have been home? Moi!" . . . whirling about with such violence as to come in collision with my dear work-basket, which he sends spinning into the fire. "Dites! —

say; do you think I have been home? do you?" . . .

"I do not, indeed, Mr. Tricoupis," — catching my breath, and backing up against the door.

"I 've wandered hours and hours, — a lost man, moi, till I see the light. Aha! a light! but it is miles away — plus de cent lieues. . . . Mâshallah! It makes itself your light, sham'a! . . . yours!"

"Of course it was mine," I say soothingly, with my hand on the knob.

"Waddini gûwwa! take me in! I go forth not at all no more this night. . . . Send tidings to my dearest wife that I yet live — voilà!" Then, with a wail, "Oh, get me to bed, and make me dry," he collapses into a shapeless heap on the lounge! a Monday's wash in soak over night.

I flee to the kitchen and look not behind me! I shut the door and sit down. I promise the women boiling oil, scalding water, or whatever they prefer, if they utter one sound. I send for Nathan, who sneaked off to bed

an hour ago. I tell him to get his weather-coat and light the lantern. I return to the wet mass of misery, which by this time is stuck fast to the chintz-covered divan.

I call his name. I explain to him his wife's sufferings, the cruelty of a moment's delay, the importance of his immediate departure; giving him my plighted troth that it is a quarter to twelve by the Dutch clock, and no later. I bring in Nathan, armed and equipped. I get the miscellany upon its trembling legs once more, and once more out into the storm.

Then I chain, bolt, and double bar the door behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEPTEMBER SKIES.

"Faix, mum, here 's Dr. Pestle! He 's got the b'ys in the booggy wud him, an' it 's Andy that 's dhrivin' — God help him!"

Mary is on her knees washing the piazza; her voice rings out in tune with this crisp September morning. I come out to her, and see a pleasant sight.

Nestled down between the giant Robin and our good doctor is Andy. The reins are wound round and round his poor little wrists and hands. In poetic justice to the little fellow, it is Robin who holds the useless ends of the reins this time, for Andy is really driving. The doctor's horse, Dobbin, was let into the secret of this joke and put on his honor before the party left the Home. He carries himself with unusual spirit, and trots along beautifully.

The carriage whirls round the front circle in gallant style. Goodness! how the horse does pull! "Whoa, Dobbin!" pipes a small voice; "whoa, sir!" The horse drops one ear and then the other to make sure he heard something, and stops short. "My! what a horse this is to drive!" says Andy.

"Horse?" says his owner, getting out; "you 're right, my boy, — he *is* a horse, is Dobbin. What that nag of mine does n't know,"— twisting the reins loosely about the whip, — Dobbin is on his honor, you remember, — "what that nag of mine does n't know is n't worth mentioning. Whoa, Dobbin; whoa, boy!" Which admonition is superfluous: Dobbin stands like a bronze statue of himself.

With the crutch under one arm and the little cripple sitting easily on the other, the dear old doctor marches into the house.

"Here, ma'am! here 's a present for you. Where 'll you have it?"

"Right here, doctor; drop it down," I say, moving out a particularly comforta-

ble armchair and beating up the pillows. "Andy, tell Dr. Pestolido we expect him back to dine with us at half-past one; tell him this is to be Andy's last party at Ingleside."

The boy lifts his face in mute appeal to his friend, who stoops and whispers something for Andy's ear alone. Whatever the words, the lad is quite satisfied.

"You 'll dine with us to-day, doctor?" I say, following him out to his carriage. "It is our last day at Ingleside, you know; besides, we need you to carve for us."

"And Andy to ask the blessing," he says, gathering up the reins. "I 'll be glad to come. Get up, Dobbin!"

Mary watches him drive away, then picks up her pail and scrub-brushes, straightens the door-mat with her ample foot, and pauses at the open window for a word with the little hunchback.

"Where 's Keziah?" I ask.

"Forninst the wash-house, mum. She 's doing the flannins."

"Oh, is she? I want to speak to her."

I find the old woman bending over the tubs, and up to her elbows in steaming soapsuds. As usual, she has company.

"Good morning, uncle Lazarus," I say; "how 's the rheumatism?"

"On'y tol'ble, thank de Lawd; how 's de missus, dis nice mawnin'?"

"Oh, I 'm always well, uncle Lazarus; how 's aunt Caroline?"

"She don't feel no great dese days, Car'line don't; she 's right po'ly."

"Why, that 's too bad, uncle; and you 've come all this distance to bid us good-by?"

The old man scrapes his foot upon the ground and makes me a lowly reverence.

"De Lawd o' mussy bless yo', missus, for dat bundle yo' sent. Ole Laz'rus Driggus neber forgit yo' long 's he libs for thinkin' ob a pore, hard workin' cullard man like me! May de Lawd prosper ye an' all dat b'longs to ye in dis worl', an' in de nex' to come." With which benediction the old man leaves me, and shuffles away in quest of Robin.

At one end of the long wash-bench slouches Royal Ryerson: fisherman, landlord, autocrat of Craddock; he ducks his head to me.

"Nice mornin', mum, arter the rain; how's all the fambly?"

"Robin's well, thank you. This is our last day on the South Side, Mr. Ryerson."

"So I hearn tell. Hope ye like us well 'nough to come back 'nother year. Folks is a-goin' to miss ye cornsid'able in these parts, ef I do say it myself."

Which admission I am fain to accept as applying particularly to himself.

"Ef ye calc'late to try it agin, ye can have the place same terms ez before — 'lock, stock, an' bar'l,' ez Mr. Trigger says," — this with a half laugh.

"I 'm much obliged to you, I 'm sure," I rejoin. "We are very much attached to Ingleside" —

"Ryle's Ketch," says its owner, wagging his head shrewdly.

"'Ryle's Ketch,' then, — and I have to

thank you for your share in our comfort here. You have been fair and square with us; and very kind," I add, after a mental search for a better word.

Royal Ryerson gets up on his feet and makes a stride forward.

"Fa'r an' squar'— that 's the ticket! fa'r an' squar'! You 're a lady, an' don't ye forgit it; I 'd admire to make bold to shake ye by the hand, mum," extending his own; "no offense, I hope. An' I 'll say, right here, that if you takes a notion to come down to Ryle's Ketch along in the winter with that leetle shaver o' yourn for a day or so, — or two or three, fix it ter suit yerselves, — ye 're welcome. I 'll build ye up a fire in the keepin'-room — reg'lar old roarer! an' I ain't a-goin' ter charge ye nawthin' for it nex' time — that 's gospel."

With which oration he pulls off his hat, ducks his grizzled head to me once more, and saunters off to his cabin.

Keziah's face is a study during the interview. "'Fa'r an' squar'!'" she mutters,

"'fa'r an' squar',' — huh!" She stoops over the gypsy pot that hangs upon its crotch, and ladles out hot water: not for Ryle, — he has gone down the path to his cabin, — but into her second washtub.

"Nobody in the world can wash flannels but you, Keziah," I say pacifically. "We have very particular company to-day, — Andy is here for dinner."

Her black face lights up. "Lord love dat li'l cripple boy," she says softly.

"What nice little thing can you cook for him? You 're busy, I see, — I 'm sorry it happened so, — but it 's Andy's last day here, Keziah; I know you won't mind."

"Mind! Who 's a-mindin'? Shuh! I 's gwine to gib dese 'ere flannins one more renchin' in b'ilin' water, an' den I 's done. I done got suthin' in my head" — rolling it about as if she heard it rattle — "I 'm a-fixin' to cook for dat li'l chile." Which speech I take as idiomatic and make no comment.

"Ice-cream would be a treat to him," I

remark tentatively; "Nathan has lots of time to freeze it."

"Who 's dat comin' down de back road, — look a' yonder!" she exclaims. Keziah is opposed to committing herself.

"It 's Maggy's sister," I say.

"Dat gal 's pearted up powerful, Mis' M'riar. De Lawd o' mussy knows she was skinny 'nough when she fust come; warn't she a show? Grandaddy!"

"Poor thing! yes."

"Good honest wittles goes a great ways," — this sententiously.

"Indeed they do, Keziah; Andy will like vanilla flavoring in the ice-cream, I think." With which hint I leave her.

I hasten to meet the girl at the gate, — the gate that is scored with marks of angels (they could not have been tramps!) that we have entertained unawares.

"You dear child!" I call out to her. "You have come the right day, — our last, you know. You 'll stay to dinner, — Andy is here."

"Oh, indeed, ma'am, I 'd love to stay, but what will sister Angelica say?"

I put her hand — not the withered one — within my arm and move toward the house. "Sister Angelica always agrees with me, and so must you. Why, child, how rosy you are! What a great, round girl you are grown to be!"

She laughs, and smooths her poor dress in places. "Ain't I, though, and ain't Maggy? I never thought when I come down for my two weeks off it would spin out to all summer."

"Your father won't know you when he sees you."

"No more he won't, ma'am; but I never see sich a change in nobody as my little sister Maggy; she 's fleshed up right smart, since she come to the Home," — with a questioning note in her voice, — "and 'hongry' ain't no name for it."

"That is a dear little sister of yours," I say encouragingly. "Let us stay out here under the willows for a while; you 'd

better draw your shawl about you, it 's fresh this morning. So the Home closes Tuesday."

"Yes 'm, an' I go back to my work nex' day. The boss has kep' my place open for me all this time; I think he 's dretful kind."

We sit facing the bay. The salt winds are sifting their pungent odors to us from afar; they come softly and fitfully, like harmonies from an Æolian harp. In the middle distance are the telegraph wires. A congress of birds is assembled upon them to discuss ways and means, and appoint a time for their home-flitting. Yes, the summer is surely ended.

We abandon ourselves to the delicious idleness of the hour. "See those clouds," I say, — "how rapidly they are changing; and see their drifting shadows down the lane!"

"Yes 'm," she answers, but she is not thinking of the shadows. When she speaks again it is in an altered tone.

"I can't think, ma'am," she says, "who could ha' paid my board here all these weeks and weeks; must be the same one that got my little sister Maggy into the Home along o' me. I could n't ha' stayed on, o' course, if Maggy had n't come. Sister Angelica says it 's a kind lady. She must be a norful rich lady, and dretful lovin' hearted to pore folks."

"One of the Goldbarrs, may be," I suggest.

"No 'm, 't ain't Mis' Goldbarr, nor Mis' Ingot neither; sister Angelica says 't ain't ne'er a one of 'em."

"Is n't it?" I say quietly.

The girl looks at me earnestly, hesitates, and continues, —

"I wish 't I knowed her real name, I do; we want to thank her, me and Maggy does, for all her goodness to us."

I bend my head to her ear.

"Oh!" she cries; "you don't never mean to say 't was aunt Dorothy, — the sweet-faced old lady that lives at Moratika, —

that you took me to see the fust time you driv me out in your kerridge!" . . .

Her crippled hand stirs in her lap. She lays it on mine with a movement that is unspeakably eloquent.

And so we rest for a while, silent and thoughtful. I watch her upturned face as I watched it weeks, nay, months ago. No shadow of death is there now to prove the misery of her young life. The shadows have lifted, are gone; and in their stead have come the hues of life, of hope, of youth! Her very voice, one time so faint and tuneless, rings out now in joyous strain.

"See!" she says, pointing up the lane; "it 's the doctor — Dr. Pestle; he 's got somebody in the waggin with him."

"It 's aunt Dorothy!" shouts Robin, running out to us.

"You magnificent doctor!" I say, as I come over the grass and meet them at the horseblock; "and of all things, aunt Dorothy!"

The doctor offers his hand to assist the

little lady to alight. He does this with the deference of an old courtier; she makes him a quaint courtesy and turns to me.

"My dear," she says, taking my hand in both of hers very tenderly, — "my dear, Dr. Pestolido is always good to me. My heart was fixed on Ingleside to-day, — I could not let you leave Craddock without bidding you and yours farewell and Godspeed. Why, bless his heart, here 's Andy!"

The boy has followed Robin to the door, and is waiting timidly for some word of greeting. Aunt Dorothy takes the wan face between her hands, and turns it to the light, regarding it wistfully. In truth it is but a transparency, through which to see his pure spirit; only a mist of vapor that shall vanish from mortal sight, alas, so soon!

Her eyes that seek the doctor's in silent entreaty are full of tears. His answer is a scarcely perceptible gesture, — a glance above and beyond these September skies that shall never live again for Andy.

"God bless my bonny boy," she says,

sitting down suddenly, taking the little cripple in her arms, and smoothing gently his crumpled hands; "poor baby!"

"Andy 's a man!" I say briskly. "We are all coming back to Craddock next summer, — specially Andy." The little lad regards me attentively, and seems to be measuring my words. "And as to Maggy's big sister here, — why, look at her cheeks! Where are you, child?"

The girl makes a step nearer.

"Maggy said 't was you, ma'am," she falters, — "Maggy said it over and over ag'in — ever since she seed you that fust day you come to the Home — and sister Angelica would n't tell us, and — and "— The tears are brimming over.

Aunt Dorothy's only reply is to lean forward and kiss the girl's forehead. Then with a reproving look at me for my breach of confidence, turns to me, and in a hushed voice: —

"There will be no more summers for Andy, — not here! I don't know why this

should grieve me so. What a poor creature am I to say 'poor Andy,' when he shall have entered into the Eternal Summer forever!"

"No, no, aunt Dorothy," I plead, touching her shoulder, "indeed you are mistaken. Only see how stoutly he clings to the doctor's neck." The doctor has picked up the little fellow while we are talking, and is playing horse with him over the flower beds, — a staid and sober horse this time.

Aunt Dorothy's eyes follow mine; she shakes her head.

"He has not been so well lately," I begin again, "but the weather has been against him" —

"That 's jus' what 't is," cries the girl, "it 's the weather; rained stiddy for a week, it did."

"The equinoctial always comes as chief mourner when summer dies," I remark parenthetically; "this year it made a great to-do; but just you wait and see what the racy, bracy, October weather will do for Andy!"

"The dear Lord send it!" she answers quickly; then bows her head reverently and is still. After some musing she says with the old happy chime in her voice that we have come to love so well: —

"Do you know he is coming to me for what little time remains to him? The good Sisters part from him with reluctance; but Dr. Pestolido convinced them my house is the place for Andy now."

She makes this statement quite unaffectedly, — the obligation is all on her side!

"To care for him, to tend him these his last days on earth, will be a solace to me. His presence will be such a blessing in my poor home as it scarce may hold."

The dinner is a simple one. Spite of the "flannins," Keziah has achieved a dish for Andy that is not only private but strictly confidential; for it is covered up in a little soup-tureen that nobody could suspect of ever having been a gravy boat!

"That 's all for you, my son," I say,

smiling at his puzzled look; "the doctor can't have so much as a whiff of it; see what it is."

"Oysters!" he chirps, lifting the lid very carefully with one frail little claw, and peeping in, — "they 're oysters. And baby crabs! what winkie-wees!"

The doctor thinks "it is rather hard on an old fellow who is perfectly devoted to September oysters and has n't seen so much as the back of one for a year." He "would like to look that big one affectionately in the eye!" This with a covert glance at his little friend.

"Don't you do it, Andy, don't trust him," cries Robin, delightedly; "they 're every one yours; and Ryle sent the tiny crabs as a present too."

Our dinner party is held in the same dear home-room, in full view of the andirons that are bright as gold, but not nearly so bright as the blaze from hickory, cone, and light-wood. Brooding over the blaze is the same old crone of a crane with her chatelaine of

pothooks and hangers; has she not been the presiding genius of this ingle-side? The writing-table is in its old place by the other window, but bereft of all that made it so beguiling. An odd lot of magazines and picture-papers to go to the lighthouse-keeper on the Point; a ball of twine; the ink-bottle, — only these! The little old maid of a piano has her head in curl-papers and her slumber-robe on — an old ragged quilt — against her next awakening. The key — will it never open up to us again her dreams and fancies? — is where it should be this time, — in the lock. The old Dutch clock behind the stairs ticks faintly; there is a trace of sadness in its husky tones. It seems to tell us how soon — how soon its trembling hands, lacking their wonted care, may lie clasped and still. In vain do I offer it the consolations of the crickets and the resident ghost. Their lease has not yet expired.

Did we say the dinner was a simple one? We quite forgot the pyramid of ice-cream which appeared in due form and in what

might be called the height of the fashion. I need not have given the thing another thought; Keziah can be depended on when Andy is host.

We move our chairs out under the low spreading chestnut. Aunt Dorothy takes her knitting from the old-time-y reticule, — a part of her quaint dress, and which she likes to carry with her on such festive occasions, — pins the knitting-sheath to her side, and fitting the needle into the quill, draws closer to Maggy's sister.

"It will be hard for you," she says kindly, "to leave this lovely place; I shall miss you both."

"Yes 'm; it 'll be hard, of course, fust off. But then there 's father; he 's made out bad enough without me all summer, I doubt."

"No doubt he has," the old lady says dryly.

"But what I mind most is for Maggy, — it 'll come hardest on Maggy. Sometimes, ma'am, she don't seem to have the right look

in her face — peak-ed or scairt-like — I do' know how to say it; Andy 's got that same look," — this in a whisper.

"That little sister of yours is coming out all right, my child. Just think what a clean, decent place you 're going to; you can thank the Sisters for that. And to live with that nice old lady, too; that 's a great lift."

"Indeed, ma'am, and don't I know it!"

"Then that little feather-bed! Only think how those country feathers are going to ease her poor back! You must write me a letter when you 're all fixed, and tell me everything about it."

"Why, yes," chimes in the doctor from his place beside the little hunchback; "Andy and I must hear that letter."

The little fellow is propped up in a big chair with many soft pillows; Robin has put a small table before him and seated himself opposite; all three are busy pasting foreign stamps in Robin's scrapbook.

"Dr. Pestle gave 'em to me," Robin says

in answer to my inquiring look, — "gave me all he had; — there 's some awful hard ones among 'em."

"Hard ones?" I query.

"I did n't know Robin was collecting foreign stamps," interposes the doctor; "they 're of no earthly use to me; I wish I had known before."

And so we while away our last afternoon at Ingleside, — Ingleside, that must be to us so soon but a tender memory!

Later, Nathan brings old Dobbin to the door. Aunt Dorothy puts up her knitting-work, not forgetting the sheath, and ties her bonnet-strings. When she is seated in the doctor's carriage and the little hunchback has been made comfortable on her lap (for he is to be left at the Home on their way back to Moratika), the old doctor steps in too. Keziah, in her brand-new bandanna, and tender-hearted Mary with her apron to her eyes, are standing at the kitchen door for a last look at Andy. Even Ryle Ryerson — rough-wrought savage that he is — stops

halfway to the creek, pulls off his rag of a hat, and is swinging it about his head.

The setting sun is pouring a flood of splendor down the highway, like that other road of glory which the lad is so soon to know. The radiance is about him and around him. He is waving gayly from the back of the carriage his little stump of a crutch, — is it not the symbol of his poor, pitiful life? Presently a bend in the road shuts him from our eyes.

"De Lawd A'mighty bless dat li'l angel boy!" breathes a simple heart behind me. "He 's gwine up to glory, Mis' M'riar, — he 's mos' in de Kingdom!"

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